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"He did not hear the soft shoo-shoo of approaching footsteps."

FRONTISPIECE

—PAGE 112.

A
JAPANESE ROMANCE

IN
THE NETHER HOLLAND

BY
THE AUTHOR OF "THE JAPANESE IN THE NETHER HOLLAND" ETC.



PRINTED BY
THE EAST ASIAN COMPANY, LIMITED



A
JAPANESE ROMANCE

BY
CLIVE HOLLAND

AUTHOR OF
"MY JAPANESE WIFE," "MUSUMÉ," "A WRITER OF FICTION," ETC.



TORONTO
THE COPP CLARK COMPANY, LIMITED

1905

The Gresham Press
UNWIN BROTHERS, LIMITED
WOKING AND LONDON.

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TO
THOMAS HARDY, ESQ.,
NOVELIST AND POET
THIS BOOK IS, WITH HIS PERMISSION,
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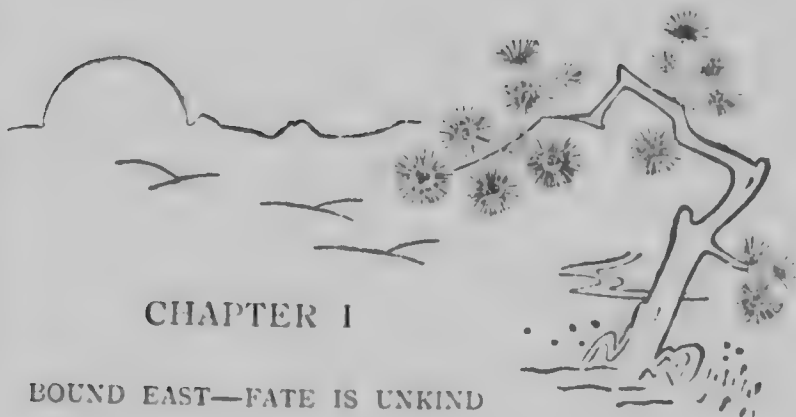
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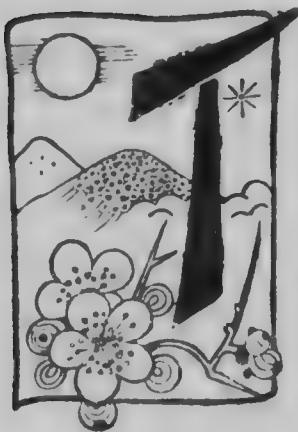
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CHAPTER I

BOUND EAST—FATE IS UNKIND



THE wide expanse of sea through which the *Orient Queen* was steadily ploughing her way at a good fifteen knots was like a sheet of hammered brass. The fan-shaped wake, with its narrow, lacelike edge of white-churned foam, and the rounded swell of the North Pacific sweeping through the Loochoo Islands, was all that disturbed its monotonous horizon-bounded surface.

Underneath the white awnings of the promenade deck most of the passengers were lounging in chairs, keeping even their feet out of any lozenge-shaped patches of sunshine which, straying through too loosely laced edges of the awning, fell on the deck beneath. Those who were not too hot, or talking,

cudgelled their brains into imagining they were cool.

The officers not on duty, or below snatching a little belated sleep, were chatting with the passengers, their preference being obviously for the ladies.

On the port side of the ship in a corner near the after deck-house were two people, a man and a young girl, quite apart from the rest of the passengers, their two canvas deck-chairs placed with the propinquity which the two months' shipboard acquaintance of their occupiers would be considered as justifying.

The girl was fair, as judged against the bronze of some of the other lady passengers ; and when compared with the olive-tinted Japanese women returning to Nagasaki from Shanghai she looked fragilely pale. Her face was oval and pretty, notwithstanding its lack of colour, whilst her figure, the lines of which were scarcely disguised by the folds of the thin, white muslin dress she wore, was singularly graceful.

The man was about thirty, good-looking, and rather above middle height. His attire only differed from that of the rest of the male passengers in that he wore a silk tie of the butterfly order, a relic of his Art student days in the Quartier Latin.

"A few more hours," said the girl, after a somewhat lengthy pause in the conversation, changing her pose languidly, "and we shall be at Nagasaki."

"Yes," her companion assented. "And I shall have to look up my comical friend Yumoto,



On the port side of the ship, one two people
apart from the rest of the passengers. PAUL 2.

McKenzie, and the rest, and find a house which I can convert into a studio."

"I often wonder, Mr. Somerville, why you think so much of Art, with a capital 'A,' and so little of——"

There was a pause.

"Well?" interjected the listener encouragingly.

"So little of humanity even with a small, un-socialistic 'h.'"

"So little of feminine humanity, Miss Desborough?" quizzed the speaker, laughing.

"I did not say so," replied the girl, a shade of colour stealing into her cheeks; "but, after all, what does it matter? in a few hours we shall all be scattered," waving her hand towards a knot of passengers further along the deck. "You will go to your lotus ponds, wistaria-covered tea-houses—you cannot imagine how fascinating they are—and I to my family group in Tokio, comprised of a dear old uncle, an unconscionable aunt, and three impossible cousins. In a word, we shall all forget our fellow-passengers."

"I am not so sure of that," said the man, thinking of a dainty water-colour sketch that he had made of his companion. "I hope if I find myself near Tokio I may call, and that if you hear of an Englishman in trouble you will interest your uncle to get the authorities to let him off."

"I am sure my people will be very pleased to see you. They owe you a debt of gratitude for having amused me during the last few monotonous weeks."

"And yet you were regretting a little while ago that the monotony would soon be at an end."

"Because when one is lazy," replied Miss Desborough thoughtfully, "one regrets anything which means a change. Although I have called the voyage monotonous, I shall not forget that I have made at least one pleasant acquaintance, and have learned something during the last few weeks."

It was on the tip of Somerville's tongue to ask to what she referred, but he said nothing and regarded her somewhat curiously, wondering whether she would say more. There was a pause, and then she continued inconsequently—

"But I have a few more lines to add to my mail, and I think I must go and write them in case we catch the homeward-bound steamer at Nagasaki."

Leslie Somerville studied her face for a moment as she rather petulantly kicked away the clinging folds of her skirt preparatory to rising, and then got up to assist her, for the vessel was rolling.

"Now!" he exclaimed, and just when the deck was steady he gave a slight upward pull on the girl's wrists.

"Thanks. This deck-chair is my favourite, but it's no joke getting up out of it when the ship is rolling. I shall see you at lunch. I have read 'Le Fin d'Amour,' and will bring it back for you then. I am afraid my aunt would have a fit on the spot if she knew you had lent it to me. Goodbye till lunch."

Somerville watched her till she vanished in the

doorway of the deck-house, and then, tossing the stump of his cigar overboard, he strolled forward.

He was almost angry with himself for regarding Violet Desborough from so purely an artistic standpoint. She had said something to the effect that shipboard friendships were the least satisfactory of all. People met, liked each other, amused one another, parted at the end of the voyage, and—forgot.

He would not forget—no. But probably only because the memory of Violet Desborough was enshrined in one of the daintiest and most successful *plein air* sketches he had ever made—a sketch which she had coveted, but had been, to tell the truth, only too willing that he should retain. He ought, perhaps, to have fallen in love with her in two months. There had been plenty of time, and no opportunity of escaping from any influence or fascination that she was able to exert. But he had not done so; and he realised that he still personally regarded marriage vaguely and rather in the light of a joke, though his male friends of the Quartier Latin had always told him, with quasi-serious faces, that the joke was less apparent after the fact. Meanwhile he would let the matter rest.

He would doubtless marry some day; it might be a model, even one of the dainty Japanese maidens of the flower-decked land he had travelled so many thousand miles of sea to study. Who could tell?

His memory leapt back to Petite Suzanne with the flashing eyes. When he was a *nouveau* at

Colorossi's, before he had come into his money, he had been about to marry her. But she vanished one fine June morning and returned Madame Semperson, having preferred a young American friend of his own who lived less near the sky, and possessed more money and less application.

Half an hour passed speedily enough in these reminiscent musings, and Somerville was not recalled to an appreciation of his surroundings until the luncheon bell, clanging horribly but welcome between decks, caused a stream of hungry fellow-passengers to surge past him.

A slight rearrangement of the tables of the saloon, to permit of a platform being erected for the final evening concert of the voyage, had separated Somerville and Miss Desborough. They could only smile, perhaps she somewhat sadly, across the tables; and after lunch Somerville felt compelled to start the packing up, which, man-like, he had postponed almost till the last moment.

At dinner the separation was repeated, and in the confusion following the meal, whilst the stewards rushed hither and thither clearing out the tables as far as possible and rearranging the chairs, neither Somerville nor Violet Desborough found an opportunity for anything more than a casual remark.

The concert commenced almost immediately, and as Miss Desborough was to sing she sat in the front row near the mimic stage with the rest of the performers, and consequently away from Somerville.

Beyond an occasional glance back at him sitting

in the fourth row, or a nod—that unsatisfactory substitute for speech—when their eyes happened to meet, there was no opportunity for any sort of communication until the performance came to an end.

At length, however, the last notes of Madame Kian-San's plaintive little voice melted away, and the last thin notes of her *samisen* accompaniment were lost in the stir of the audience as they rose at the opening bars of "God Save the Queen." A feeling of sadness, of the inevitable end of things, swept over even those who expected to rejoin relatives or friends twelve hours later.

From the saloon nearly every one went on deck. A slight breeze had sprung up. Cool it could scarcely be called, but it served to ruffle the moonlit surface of the sea into the semblance of frosted silver.

The company split up into its usual knots and coteries, more accentuated than ever to-night, perhaps because of the partings on the morrow.

In the stillness of the night, in the vastness of the silvery horizon, unbroken save at rare intervals when for a brief moment a trading or fishing junk with huge, oblong mat sails stood up in the steamer's course, a sharp, black silhouette in the moonlit track, there seemed to many the sadness of farewell.

So it seemed to Violet standing with Somerville near the weather rail gazing at the phosphorescent wake.

"I hope you will find a nice studio," the former

remarked in lieu of anything better to say and making an effort to avoid sentiment; "but there should be little difficulty, the Japanese are an ingenious race, and will carry out suggestions or copy anything you show and explain to them accurately enough."

"So I have heard," Somerville assented. "I remember what you told me about your workbox and its chipped top. But let us talk of something less prosaic. Don't you realise, Miss Desborough, that you are encouraging me in Art, which you have hinted I already pursue too closely?"

"You are not grateful."

"Alas! I fear I am not a grateful man, I do not make a right use of my opportunities," glancing into the face of the woman at his side.

The latter moved ever so slightly away from him, with her the tension was growing painful to the point of embarrassment.

In the moonlight her slender figure appeared almost ethereal; if it had seemed less so it is probable Somerville's life would have taken a new trend.

A junk swam ghost-like across the broad moonlit track.

"How much more to be desired is progress such as that," said Somerville musingly, "than the hurrying-scurrying, throbbing, onward rush of this modern liner! Steam has knocked half of the poetry out of existence, and given us in its stead the spirit of unrest."

"Yes," replied the girl, as though her thoughts were elsewhere, adding "most women, I fancy, read poetry because they vaguely hope to some day live it."

She congratulated herself that she could speak so calmly. So long as her companion did not touch her she felt almost sure of herself. Three generations of forebears in the diplomatic service had endowed her with an unusual power of control, and the power to keep the one secret of a woman's life which so few can dissemble.

An ocean-going steamer on a long voyage would be an anomaly without the presence of at least one match-making, hyper-inquisitive woman, and the *Orient Queen* had proved no exception to the rule.

Somerville and Violet Desborough had right out from Aden been so much together that their apparent identity of tastes and pursuits had long ago aroused a considerable amount of interest in the minds of fellow-passengers not themselves equally absorbed. A Mrs. Thirston had for some weeks regarded them as an interesting young couple and—her legitimate prey. Not being afflicted with undue delicacy of perception or feeling—such women seldom are—she had at first by covert hints, and later by but thinly-veiled pleasantries, endeavoured to let them see that though every other soul on board were blind she saw which way the wind blew. That they took no notice of her scarcely disturbed her equanimity. Indeed, it only made her keener on the scent and less guarded in her

remarks. Her friends on board, people who either feared her or were amused by her love of scandal, were kept well posted in Somerville's and Miss Desborough's movements, and every glance which passed between them and every hour they spent together was noted down by the Argus-eyed little busybody as so much drift further towards the maelstrom of matrimony.

On this last night of the voyage she had determined to bring the matter to a climax, and to add one more instance to her list of "people made happy; you know, they never would have made up their silly minds but for me." That the two persons most concerned would possibly resent her interference apparently did not occur to her.

On this last night she came along the promenade deck vivaciously as usual, with a shawl thrown round her shoulders, glancing sharply into shadowed corners where deck-chairs nestled together, or isolated couples stood gazing out over the moonlit waters in suspicious propinquity. At length she espied Somerville and Miss Desborough.

They were evidently talking earnestly, and with a feeling of an artist in matrimonial matters she feared for a moment lest an unkind fate should have deprived her of the glory of putting the finishing touches to what she considered her subtle work of weeks.

As she approached quietly she overheard Somerville exclaim, "The last night! There is always something sad in the last of anything, especially in

the last of gaiety and pleasant companionship. Despite the adage, anticipation is not always the greater part of pleasure. I, for example, did not want to come this voyage at all. And now —" The listener lost the conclusion of the sentence in the shrill laugh of a girl who ran hoydenishly along the deck, still in her brief-skirted tableau dress, pursued by a couple of boisterous admirers.

Violet Desborough was speaking by the time Mrs. Thirston was again able to catch the conversation.

"... you will never forget your first impressions..."

The listener coughed. The chaplain's services would evidently not be required, though matters were progressing so favourably. It would doubtless be a wedding at the Legation in Tokio; she must watch the columns of the *Figi-Shimpo* for an announcement.

At the sound Somerville turned his head. He recognised the cough, and if the expression which flitted across his face as the light from the deck-house fell upon it could have embarrassed Mrs. Thirston, she would have moved away.

But the latter was not easily abashed.

"Ah! you young people," she exclaimed, with a jaunty assumption of age and seriousness, "last nights of a voyage would indeed be sad were it not for the happy to-morrows. Yes, I know what it is to be young. Love's young dream, and all the rest. How does it go?" and she hummed a few bars of an ultra-sentimental song which a thin-

voiced soprano had sung at the concert an hour ago.

Her victims made no reply. Somerville was biting his moustache savagely; whilst his companion had turned away to lean over the rail and gaze down at the water with something like tears of mortification in her eyes.

Mrs. Thirston paused, and then said, with the pleasantry of a mortified inquisitor, "There, you must excuse me. It is only my deep interest in you young people, and my wish that you may be very happy, that had caused me to venture to speak . . ."

"Curse her impudence!" muttered the man under his breath, as he felt the girl at his side give a little convulsive heave of her shoulders.

"I shall look in the *Herald* and *Jigi-Shimpo* for an interesting announcement. Of course, Mr. Somerville, you will find your way to Tokio—such a very interesting place, old temples, and all that. You really must go."

He might have been mistaken, but Somerville thought he detected a strain of malice in the tone, and he made up his mind quickly. The situation was intolerable.

"It is none of my business," Mrs. Thirston was continuing in a quickly assumed aggrieved tone.

"Obviously," interjected Somerville sarcastically, "and I must ask you to excuse us. Come, Miss Desborough," he said, slipping his arm through hers, "we shall find it pleasanter forward."

Mrs. Thirston stood watching their retreating figures as they strolled away along the deck, Violet with her head slightly bent and Somerville inwardly fuming and erect as a ramrod.

When they were out of earshot, and away from the rest of those on the port-side of the deck, Somerville spoke.

"Violet," he said slowly, resting his hand for a moment on hers, which lay upon the rail, "you must know what I am going to say to you ; I want you to love me and marry me. We have seen a great deal of each other on the voyage, and I'm sure I could make you very happy. And then, after we had seen Japan together, we would return to England, which you love, and settle down—I to work to gain a name and love you, and you to love me and be the mistress of my home. What do you say ? Don't you care for me just a little, dear ?"

And then, ere she could reply, he added with a flash of brightness, which almost served to cover his too matter-of-fact proposal, "Or is living with the impossible cousins too great an attraction ?"

But he was not a good liar, and the girl at his side knew too well the difference between liking and loving. He could not, therefore, deceive her, even though she were willing enough to permit the deception.

Her voice, when she spoke, was not very steady, but there was a note of unmistakable finality in it.

"It must be no, Mr. Somerville—believe me it must !" she said, ignoring his last remark. "I shall

always think of this voyage with pleasure, and remember all your goodness and kindness with gratitude. You have paid me the greatest compliment it is possible for a man to pay a woman, and under circumstances which only a woman can quite truly appreciate. Do not ask me to say more. Believe me, it must not be ; think of me as grateful and even proud, not as the frivolous girl I may have appeared. Goodbye. No," as he moved along the deck at her side, "I would rather go alone."

When he had released her hand and she had gone, he waited a few minutes thinking vaguely, and then went below to his state-room. He could almost imagine now that he did love her, that he was cut up by her refusal. That she cared for him he had no doubt.

At last he recognised that he had been too precipitate. Of course she had seen through it all, how the whole business had been as it were forced upon him. She was a plucky girl, and he had not been so wise as he might have been.

He turned in, and fell asleep thinking of his good intention which had failed through no great fault of his own.



CHAPTER II

THE WELCOMING OF THE "GRIFFIN"



SHORTLY after sunrise Goto Shima was sighted—a bluish, indistinct line on the port horizon.

Most of the passengers were on deck, and Mrs. Thirston, in no way discomposed by her encounter of the previous night, was chatting gaily to a knot of acquaintances who had never before beheld the glories of a Japanese sunrise.

Violet Desborough, however, had not yet appeared, and Somerville, noting this, had betaken himself forward to the turtle-deck so that he might gain an uninterrupted view of the glories of the growing day.

A pearly haze floated lightly on the surface of the water, transparent as gossamer, through which the

climbing sun seemed to strike in indescent beams, the pink light giving an almost weird look to the people and objects on the steamer's deck. Soon Goto Shima was sinking below the horizon astern and its place taken on the starboard bow by wooded Nomo Saki, thrusting its pointed nose out into the grey-blue sea.

The onward rush of the vessel, the thud of whose engines seemed to have increased as though she were hurrying towards the nearing port, created a light, cool air which blew wreaths of mist across the deck to speedily vanish in the haze astern.

Somerville, with the seeing eye of an artist rather than the devouring but the non-receptive vision of a globe-trotter, noted with wonder and admiration the ever-changing beauties of this first, fresh, Japanese morning. To the look-out men the opalescent haze was no more than the merest Channel wrack, stirred into movement by a southerly breeze, which might hide danger, and spell for them strained attention and discomfort.

The huge, oblong sail of a junk floating bodiless dead ahead above the shallow sea of mist and tipped rose-pink in the sunrise caused a momentary confusion as the steamer's course was altered a couple of points. And as she swept past the motionless craft the sail flapped lazily, and then sharply and quicker, against the mast as the ungainly bulk of the fishing vessel felt the steamer's wash, whilst from the mist-enshrouded deck arose shrill shouts of "*Abunaiyo! Abunaiyo*" as though the occupants

WELCOMING OF THE "GRIFFIN" 17

thought the liner was on top of them. Then, as she vanished astern, there came, clear above the thrud of the engines, a chorus of morning greetings, "*Oh iyo!*" with, perhaps, an ironical "*Sayonara.*"

The morning coffee-bell clanging brazen-tongued between the decks drowned the goodbyes of the fishermen, and brought Somerville to a sense of hunger and more mundane things. With a sigh of regret at losing even a few minutes of such a scene, as the now melting haze disclosed in mysterious, ethereal vistas, he hurried below to the saloon, crowded by the throng of early risers and noisily gay with the babel of talk.

Violet Desborough was not there. Perhaps it were better so, he thought, as he hastily gulped down the steaming coffee. He would be sure to see her at the last to say goodbye, and anything but a hurried farewell would be embarrassing for both of them.

The third officer came into the saloon. Above the babel of various questionings his voice could be heard exclaiming, "How can I tell, Mrs. Jones? You'll be told at the proper time.—A good hotel, Mr. Blayner? the 'Bellevue,' on the Bund, would be about your ticket.—In a couple of hours. Why, bless me, yes, coolies? Scores of them."

Escaping his interrogators, he crossed to where Somerville was standing, and said cheerily, "We have just sighted Cape Saki, Mr. Somerville, and if you want to see Japan you can do so for the haze has lifted."

"Thanks, Mr. Elderson," replied Somerville, just as a lady passenger anxiously questioned the former as to whether her luggage would be ransacked.

When Somerville reached his point of vantage in the bows the blue outlines of Japan were creeping up out of the sea right ahead. The smoke of a tramp in ballast, her screw churning white and at times half out of water, hung on the port bow like a patch in the sky over the Nagasaki hills as though they were volcanoes, with scarcely any air to draw it into a streaky veil along the horizon. Trading junks, at first mere dots on the scarcely ruffled water, became gradually larger as the *Orient Queen* drew rapidly in towards the land.

Soon the wooded heights flanking the entrance to the harbour channel on either side took more definite form, their grey-green tones of pine and cryptomerias and more vivid tints of bamboo, palms, and elms gradually disclosing themselves.

The stir which pervades a vessel on nearing port was now audible; and it must have been this which summoned Violet Desborough to leave her cabin.

As the steamer entered the channel which led to the anchorage Somerville left his post and came down to the forepart of the promenade deck. He had caught a glimpse of Violet as she came out of the deck-house and crossed to the lee side.

She was very pale, and there was the strained look which comes from sleeplessness in her eyes.

In the wakeful hours of the hot night, when the

monotonous thud of the engines seemed to beat itself into her brain, she had realised that happiness had slipped from her grasp. Fate had never been very kind to her; and now in the person of Mrs. Thirston she felt it had been cruel. She even persuaded herself that she might, but for the latter, have been happy instead of miserable in the thought that Somerville had cared for her.

As he approached she pulled herself together; it would be added bitterness if he detected her distress.

"You have missed the sunrise, Miss Desborough," he said almost reproachfully.

"I am afraid I have," she replied after shaking hands, turning away to gaze at the now sunlit hills. "But you must remember it is not my first sunrise in Japan."

"I had forgotten. I have never seen anything like it before." Then changing his tone he continued, "Before long we shall be in port. Let me assure you, I trust you will believe me, how truly sorry I am for Mrs. Thirston's impudence—I can call it nothing else. I have had very little experience of such women, thank God, or I should doubtless have known better than to have given her a chance of meddling. It may be a lesson." And the speaker laughed somewhat bitterly.

"Think no more about it," the girl replied sadly. "I was as much to blame as you, perhaps more. But it was a temptation to talk to one who knows so much, and who has been so amusing and kind.

Mrs. Thirston was only an episode, a thunder-streak in a clear sky. Let us forget it."

"You are very generous," exclaimed Somerville, still feeling somewhat contrite as he noted the speaker's unusual pallor. "You will always think of me as a friend, will you not? If it were not for the Mrs. Thirstons of this world a good deal of mischief might be avoided."

"I shall always do so," said the girl, replying to his question, "and I shall not forget the pleasant things of the voyage. See, we are quite in the Channel now, half an hour or so and we shall be at anchor off the quay. Those are the hills above and at the back of the town," she continued. "Lovely, are they not? But wait till you see them in their full glory, when the maples change colour. It is doubtless up on the hillside that you will find your studio——"

A rush of excited and voluble passengers full of wonder at the beauty of the panorama gradually unfolding itself, and the strange, stagey look of the exquisite, fresh green hills now closing in upon them, drowned her concluding words. When their voices fell her companion heard her say—

"Let us bid one another goodbye. If you come to Tokio I hope you will call on my uncle; I dare-say he might be able to put you in the way of things you might otherwise miss. Goodbye, do not forget."

She held out her hand, which Somerville clasped warmly.

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"*Sayonara*, then," he said, using one of the words she had laughingly taught him; "but after all I prefer *au revoir*."

"*Sayonara*," she replied. And disengaging her hand, with one glance at his face she left him.

As she threw herself sobbing on her state-room couch she remembered the novel; and this too, then, for her was *le fin d'amour*, or, rather, the end of the dream of it.

Round a slight bend the steamer, still in the subdued light caused by the overhanging hills, on the higher summits of which the dazzling white sunlight was shining, passed into the open sunshine of the wide bay around which the town is built. Flowers seemed to have perfumed the warm air, unexpected gradations of colour in wonderful freshness of tint met the eye on the hillsides behind the scattered town, on the heights of which could be seen the matchbox-like villas of the merchants and more wealthy classes.

Across the lagoon-like expanse of water, the surface just ruffled here and there by the draughts of air stealing down the mountains, giving transient motion to the white sails of the flocks of picturesque though unwieldy junks, the *Orient Queen* swept along at half-speed. A shouting arose from the half-naked, yellowish, or copper-skinned rowers of the crowd of sampans that, like flocks of waterfowl, skurried with apparent aimlessness hither and thither, hampering the steamer's progress at imminent risk of being run down. The boom-boom of the steam

siren reverberated from the gorges and rock-strewn hillside. Ahead was the Bund, lined with mercantile and shipping offices, white in the morning glare. On the quay itself Somerville, as the steamer drew closer in towards it, could see the crowd of coolies, clad in tight-fitting hose and stagey, blue tunics, waiting to unload, with their marvellous celerity, the passengers' luggage and cargo, a sprinkling of Europeanised hotel and restaurant porters and bare-legged, hatless, or over-hatted *jinrikisha* men standing in the background.

Yumoto was there, and McKenzie. Somerville caught sight of them almost immediately, looking out for him with hand-shaded eyes from the elevation of some blue petroleum casks on end. The former, a queer figure in Anglo-Japanese attire, in a black bowler hat, tennis flannels, and a brilliantly blue, flowered *kimono*; the latter in immaculately white ducks and a wide-brimmed panama, perched well forward over his face.

They waved their hats as they caught sight of Somerville. To both of them he was a fresh importation from the West; to McKenzie "a wee bit o' hame," though Somerville had in fact been born far south of the Tweed.

Soon the steamer was alongside, and the coolies swarmed across her decks.

Yumoto and McKenzie were the two first landsmen to step aboard, and they eagerly made their way towards Somerville, who stood on the fringe of the little crowd of passengers which was blocking the after gangway.

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"So you've turned up all right," exclaimed the Scotsman, with a firm but undemonstrative grasp of the hand. "There are plenty of pretty *geisha* ready to lose their hearts to you—for a consideration, and old Yumoto" (the person referred to glared comically at the speaker) "keeps a capital store of Glenlivet in a ridiculous paper-panelled cupboard, which I always feel inclined to put my fist through instead of unfasten."

"*Irasshaimashi*——" began Yumoto, at last seizing hold of Somerville's hand.

"Which, being interpreted, means in his amazing lingo 'welcome,'" put in McKenzie.

"What he says all right. Very good whisky, my boy, at my office just along there. McKenzie come in often, very often. Business? No; whisky." And the little Japanese shook with laughter at the sly dig he had given his big, sandy-haired, loose-limbed, Glenlivet-imbibing friend.

"Hold hard!" ejaculated the latter good-temperedly, "more about the whisky anon. But let's get hold of Somerville's light baggage, and away from this crush. The coolies can bring the rest."

"Hi!" he called out to a small coolie who was staggering along under a huge calin trunk, and on the back of whose blue cotton tunic a white disk as large as a dinner-plate was emblazoned, "bring all the honourable Englishman's august luggage" (spelling out the name, and handing the coolie a label torn off the bag Somerville was himself carrying) "up to my house, Dura Hill."

"*Nani hodo, Ito,*," replied the man, with a pleased grin as he staggered along the gangway.

"It's all right," said McKenzie; "come along."

It was only about a hundred and fifty yards to Yumoto's office, which was right on the Bund, and faced the landing-stage of one of the principal Japanese steamship companies.

From the brilliant noonday sunshine, which struck up from the surface of the water in blinding flashes like the workings of innumerable heliographs, and the heat of the quay, it was a relief to pass into the shade and comparative coolness of the impracticable-looking office.

Somerville was both interested and amused by the strange blendings of East and West which it displayed. A climb up a flight of rickety wooden stairs, that trembled and creaked under McKenzie's ponderous tread and the bamboo rail of which shivered convulsively when any one laid a hand on it, brought them to the narrow lacquer-panelled door on which hung a small, quaint bronze knocker, representing a Japanese artist's fantastic conception of a dolphin.

When Somerville, whose slang designation was '*griffin*,' had been thrust into the seat of honour, a revolving pedestal chair salvaged from the saloon of an English steamer lost on Hirado Shima, he was able to observe things.

Opposite him, fastened to the greyish wall with four large Japanese hairpins and some pieces of gummed stamp paper, was a flaming red, orange and

black poster of Cheret's depicting in startling pose a favourite dancer at the Café des Ambassadeurs ; a veritable echo of home to Somerville, fresh from Paris and the Quartier Latin. Near the absurdly frail little lacquered cupboard which hung in the corner of the wall near his desk, and from which Yumoto proceeded to extract the large brown square bottle to which McKenzie had referred so invitingly, was an English poster, also of theatrical import, alongside an idealistic panel of Hokusai's on a buff-coloured ground. Beneath this hung a fine photo of St. John's College, flanked by one of the Place de la Concorde looking up the Avenue des Champs Élysées, and a panoramic view of Nagasaki taken from the heights of Venus Hill behind the foreign settlement ; whilst the rest of the wall space was mostly covered with steamship bills, coloured pictures from illustrated papers, and almanacs of European shipping firms.

Somerville's semi-sarcastic comment concerning the heterogeneous character of the art displayed to his astonished gaze brought forth Yumoto's invariable defence of his taste.

"It is true Art, a mixture of all sorts such as that in which you used to revel in the Rue de la Grande Chaumière," he replied, smiling cheerfully as he pushed in the glass ball of a soda-split with the top of a slender ebony ruler ; "it arrests attention. Art should be one big poster if one is to sell one's pictures ; that is what your friend Semperson used to say when I discussed the question with him after

my morning's study at the Sorbonne. He could never do anything big, so he failed."

"Now that thing over there," continued the speaker, after a pause occupied in drinking the health and future prosperity of the newly arrived griffin, pointing to the poster by Cheret, "is, as the French have it, 'a blow in the eye.' No one who enters my office can overlook its obvious merits. It is, moreover, good for business, you——"

But McKenzie broke in. "Dry up, old chap, that's another story. Let's get something out of Somerville."

And then followed a torrent of questions concerning Western things, the doings of the fellows in Paris and London, and numerous interested inquiries after the present position of several of the artists' models and lady art students of the Quartier Latin.

For McKenzie, be it remarked, would have been an artist could he have made money thereby, and had passed fifteen months in the schools ere he discovered he could not. He was now making money, and ostensibly pursuing art with a small 'a' as manager of a Japanese porcelain factory near Kago Street.

Somerville satisfied all McKenzie's inquiries prompted by home-hunger and Yumoto's studiously polite ones after the young lady students at the Sorbonne, and the *habitués* at the Café d'Har-court, who used to admire his gay-coloured *kimono* blue-tasselled skull cap, and comical yellow face.

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His recollections of a certain lively little lady nicknamed "Demi-Siphon" by the students, on account of her small size and effervescing spirits, were cut short by the rumble and rattle of the mailboat blowing off steam.

Somerville started, for the detonations shook the room, and rattled the outer shutters and the sliding paper panels dividing it from a storeroom, as though the whole fabric were about to collapse.

Yumoto smiled and calmly mixed another drink.

"You will get used to it," he said; "my office has stood two earthquakes. It is very firm."

McKenzie frankly laughed at Somerville's alarm.

But to the latter there was something terribly unsubstantial about the whole premises.

With the shutting off of the steam on the liner, the minor noises of the quay again became apparent: sharp, clear voices; the clang of hammers on iron; the screech of steam winches and cranes swaying out cargo, in unison with the brilliant, harsh sunlight outside. The reverberating boom, boom of a gun, set the sunny air quivering. It was that of the Shinto monastery, and its sound reminded McKenzie that he was due at home.

"We'd better be getting on," he said to Somerville. "You'll be glad of something to eat, even if old San-to, our cook, cannot entirely break free from native habits sufficiently to serve us a real European meal. Yumoto, old chap, you'll drop in for a smoke to-night, and if you see young Folkard

hanging around during the day, tell him to come right along too."

Yumoto nodded. He would be sure to turn up, he said; and he smiled complacently at his pat use of the idiom.

"And how," called he after them, as they were going gingerly down the stairs, "is Madame?"

McKenzie laughed a little uncomfortably, and replied, "Very well, thank."

Somerville looked mystified, and said inquiringly, "I didn't know you were married, old chap."

"No?" replied his friend. "You will see what a charming little person Katakuri is."

From the top of the flight of outside stairs Yumoto smiled. He might have to find a wife for Somerville, he thought. It was really wonderful how constant McKenzie's affections still were.



CHAPTER III

THE MAN AND THE WOMAN MEET



THE two men took their way along the Bund towards the eastern side of the harbour. A bare-legged, blue-jacketed coolie, wearing upon his bullet-shaped head, an antiquated pith helmet, no longer white, and ornamented with a sprawling yellow dragon across the front, was carrying Somerville's light baggage tied to the wooden frame on his back.

McKenzie's house was a bit further "out of town" than most of those of the foreign merchants. In fact, it clung on the hillside rather close to the upper fringe of the native town, stretching to the north along the Tokitsu road. Leaving the blinding glare of the waterside, McKenzie struck

turned. A turn to the right, and through a narrow, hilly path, they pursued their way parallel to the quay.

Somerville talked little. He was noting the quaintness of everything. He felt almost as though he had fallen from the clouds into a world of unreality and a town of toy houses. From the balcony of a big shingle-roofed *chaya* (tea-house) a *geisha* blew kisses to them from her finger-tips as they passed up the loose-paved ascent. This had happened too often to the seasoned McKenzie for him to do more than smile, shake his head, and call out, "*Mata Kimasu, mayouchi*"—a vague promise for the time which never comes, in remembrance of Katakuri San at home. To Somerville, the newest of *griffins* in this flowery land, the very act of the little woman was in itself charming, and the pose of the dainty figure, in its bright-hued *kimono* and elaborately tied *obi*, appealed to his artistic sense.

Seeing he was inclined to loiter his companion laughed.

"Come along," he exclaimed. "You will see heaps of prettier *geisha* and *musumé*, and with Miss Sumomo there you would scarcely touch the fringe of romance."

Then, for the rest of the way up the sloping street along which they went, now into harsh shadows clearly defined as though painted in Payne's grey on the yellowy reddish soil, and then across patches of sunlight of almost blinding intensity, McKenzie told him of Miss Sumomo's errant

affections and her many charming peculiarities—stories which, because such things are the same all the world over, seemed to Somerville to smack familiarly of the Quarter Latin.

At length they reached the house, perched up above the road on a piece of rock against the hill-side, to which McKenzie, in an outburst of national ardour, had given the name "Ecclefechan"—a word which his Japanese friends and acquaintances could never correctly pronounce.

Through a little bamboo wicket, up a flight of miniature steps cut in the rock, on which gay-coloured lizards were sunning themselves, and along a sloping, plant-bordered path, and they were on the verandah.

Quite a fur-sized garden lay at the back of the house; the way they had come was McKenzie's short-cut.

At the sound of their footsteps a panel door at the further end of the verandah was slid back, and a little figure came running with short, quick steps towards them. It was "Madame" McKenzie, resplendent in a *kimono* of peach-hued silk embroidered with silver chrysanthemums, and bound round at the waist by a broad sky-blue *obi* tied behind in a huge butterfly bow. When she caught sight of Angus her face lighted up with a smile of welcome, strangely compounded of admiration and deference for her "very much big European husband."

Then she caught sight of Somerville.

"*Yoku nashaimasta*, welcome," she exclaimed, prostrating herself quaintly, and then on rising seizing his hand "*Ingleesh way*."

She was very charming, this dainty, doll-like little woman, who scarcely stood higher than her big husband's elbow.

Somerville had scarcely time to appreciate her prettiness ere with a little laugh she vanished into the *ozashiki* (living room) which opened on to the verandah. Through the thin *shoji* her voice could be heard exhorting San-to the cook to serve tiffin without delay.

The wonderful bareness of the room into which McKenzie, after kicking off his shoes, led Somerville, with the hospitable remark that he was to consider it his own particular slip of territory for just so long as he liked, struck the latter with a slight sense of isolation. It was more bare than his sometime studio in the Rue de Madame, and how immaculately clean!

The spotless matting, on which it seemed impossible that anything more defiling than sunbeams could yet have fallen, or at worst the feet of the little mistress of the house shod in snowy-white cotton *tabi*, brought almost a sense of chill to his mind, which had not yet been cleansed from the memory of the paint-stained parquet of his Quartier Latin home. In a corner was the neatly rolled-up bed, a long mattress-shaped cushion about four inches thick, covered in some dark blue fabric, with a short bolster for pillow—this latter an

innovation of McKenzie's, who had never taken kindly to one of acacia wood like that in which Madame's elaborately coiffured head was wont to repose.

A deck-chair, a copper jar on a bracket with a flower-pot of Imari ware of elegant form and chaste colouring, which pleased Somerville's artistic sense, and a vase in one corner near the window filled with sprigs of pinky-white plum blossom, the flowers rendered wonderfully transparent by the broad shaft of sunlight which struck in under the overhanging eaves and fell upon them. That was all.

"You can fix up your painting traps here right away," McKenzie's voice struck in whilst Somerville was inspecting his surroundings. "This way,"—shoving back a panel, which ran almost silently in its wooden grooves—"leads into the garden. That is Katakuri's iris pond. Pretty, isn't it? It is she who must show you round. She knows heaps more about the flowers and things than I do, and she speaks pretty fair English. Besides, you will have to learn something of the lingo, or you'll find your models dull."

The view from the end of the verandah, which ran round three sides of this strangely fragile little house perched on the mountain-side amidst the bamboos, pines, and maples, and huge, gloomy-looking cryptomerias, was magnificent. Far below, the almost landlocked harbour lay placid and still in the sunshine, with its calm surface here and

there disturbed by the *samfans* flitting about like legless waterflies with trailing agitated tails. Away across the harbour was the gap between the hills by which the liner had entered—a darker, narrow streak of water, into the comparative gloom of which several white-sailed junks were slowly drifting with the tide. The road up which Somerville and McKenzie had climbed stretched away like a rusty red ribbon down towards the flat-roofed settlement.

As they were contemplating the outlook a soft pitter-patter of feet sounded along the matting of the passage leading to the room. A panel was slid back and Katakuri San appeared, a pretty little figure, apparently artificial enough to have stepped bodily off a fan or some rice-paper screen.

"Tiffin is quite made," she exclaimed, with the nearest approach to a European housewifely smile of pride flitting across her little tinted face, making an elaborate bow, almost a prostration, the while. "Will the great, honourable Engleesh sir have the august pleasantness to arrive?"

"The great Engleesh sir" tickled Somerville's sense of humour immensely, as did also the quaint pronunciation of his mother-tongue, with a parrot-like monotony of voice.

McKenzie laughingly explained.

"I told Katakuri," he said, "that you were a great friend of mine. She misunderstood what I meant, and is, I'll go bail, a bit disappointed in your size."

It was evident that Madame McKenzie had

learned her English sentences by heart, for she apparently failed to quite comprehend what her husband was saying.

They went together into the *ozashiki*, on the spotless matting floor of which the meal was set, a nondescript array of food over whose preparation old San-to had struggled gamely, though somewhat unsuccessfully, to transmute Eastern theories of the culinary art into Western dishes.

Katakuri San flitted about, very proud that Somerville treated her as the wife of the big Scotsman—the colour of whose hair and complexion always reminded her of the sunset seen from Kompirayama when it is hazy—for Mr. Yumoto never seemed able to treat her so.

Everything was delightfully fresh to the new arrival: the little woman in her quaintly artistic dress, a blot of colour in the white bareness of the room; the brilliant sunshine, which nothing could seemingly prevent streaming in through the interstices of the *shoji*, making ladders of light on which particles of dust floated like the interminable air-dance of gnats, and the quaint insufficiency of the numerous dishes, soup, fish, meat and fruits in bewildering forms.

Katakuri San, moreover, evidently regarded Somervill' with favour, for she tried perseveringly to converse with him in the strange mixture of Japanese, English, and French, most of which she had picked up ere McKenzie had started house-keeping with her.

She sent both men into roars of laughter, just as Mio-San—a pretty little maid—was handing round the *teriyaki* (sugar-coated plums) by declaring with pretty solemnity, after evidently much thought, that “ze Engleesh velly big honourable friend must find a *mun-um*.”

“Which being interpreted means ‘a wife’ to manage your prospective household,” explained McKenzie.

“You white wife have not? You honourable Engleesh woman bring not?” she continued inquiringly, when the two men had done laughing at her remark and the serious lines which so important a suggestion had caused to creep into her delicately rouged cheeks and ivory forehead.

“No,” answered Somerville, with an emphasis which she understood to be assuring.

“I you one bring, den,” she exclaimed gleefully, the match-making instinct akindle in her little soul. “So big, not one little big piece bigger.” And jumping up from her kneeling position she stretched out her hands with a graceful gesture on a level with her own sparkling and roguish-looking eyes.

“Observe her sense of proportion, old fellow,” said McKenzie smiling. “It is not right to her thinking that, being shorter than I, you should have a little housekeeper as tall as herself.”

Katakuri San must have thought that they were laughing at her, though she could not exactly follow the conversation, for she smiled a rather artificial

little smile, and sat down on the thin mat-like *zabuton* (cushion) in silence.

McKenzie did not return to his office as he usually did after tilfin, and the two men sat on the verandah, which was on the side of the house overlooking the town and harbour, smoking and talking over old times. The sometime artist, but now merchant, was eager to hear how his old chums of the Quartier Latin fared; and Somerville was only too willing to talk of the place which had for the last five years been home to him.

Yumoto and Folkard came up quite early, and then over coffee and cigars the four men talked on; Katakuri San listening with strained attention for the English words she knew, as they spoke of Paris, London, European politics, and their mutual friends. Then they discussed Somerville's plans till the dusk began to enmesh the hillside, the sky assume a deep blue tint powdered with gold dust, as the myriad stars came slowly out and the harbour became an irregular-shaped grey pearl, turning to black as the night drew on apace.

Down below the lights of the town sparkled, and here and there along the black gashes, which indicated the streets, paper lanterns carried by pedestrians or swung from the balconies of tea-houses, gleamed fitfully. Each *sampan* and junk in the harbour had its own gay red, orange, or pure white paper lanterns, which were so numerous that Somerville was misled into thinking that there was a *fete*.

Into the further recesses of the bay and hillsides the *Orient Queen*, which was coaling, flashed an improvised electric searchlight, throwing into strong relief the shipping, the houses, and the crowds of people gathered along the Bund, the indistinct murmur of whose voices floated up like the breaking of sea on a sandy shore.

Once the blinding beam of light flashed into the verandah and startled Katakuri San so violently that she declared that she had seen a *bake-momo* (ghost), and cowered frightened at McKenzie's feet.

"It is bad, velly bad," she exclaimed, almost in tears of vexation at having shown fear before these Englishmen.

"Yes, it isn't nice," agreed young Folkard sympathetically. "It makes things look tawdry."

"Robs the night of its poetry," said Somerville musingly, as the sky seemed to be cut off from them, "and turns the landscape into a Caran d'Ache—all lines and realism, a mere silhouette."

Yumoto was commercial. "But it enables us to see things," said he.

Katakuri San shook her elaborately coiffured head dissentingly as she remembered its blinding flash in her eyes.

"We could tell if there were an enemy in the Megami Channel," Yumoto continued. "And then what a wonderful thing electricity is! It will revolutionise labour and the commercial world."

Then the four men argued out the trend of modern progress from their individual points of view till it

got late. But at last Katakuri San took two paper lanterns, suspended from slight bamboo sticks, from the corner for the guests and lighted them, her dainty little figure half in shadow making a pretty picture as she did so, the rouge and *blanc de perle* of her cheeks being softened by the diffused orange radiance which lighted them as she peered cautiously into the narrow mouths of the lanterns to make sure they were burning properly.

When Yumoto and his companion had finally disappeared down the winding hillside path Somerville and McKenzie went in.

The former fell asleep under his smoke-blue mosquito net with the eternal chirp of the cicadæ and Katakuri San's voice in his ears, the last words which came to him faintly through the panelling being, "Yes, Fuji just the one sort girl for him." This in Katakuri San's funny little drawling voice, followed by a murmur of dissent from McKenzie.

Then a silvery little laugh, the clapping of hands, and silence.



CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST STRANDS OF THE WEB



VERY early next morning Somerville was awakened by the song of a grosbeak and the twittering of the tree-sparrows in the garden outside.

The last thing ere turning in the night before he had pushed back one of the upper panels of the *shoji*, through which now fell a ladder of golden light, soft and translucent. He lay on his thin, mattress-like bed, watching it through the haze formed by the greyish-blue mosquito curtains, and listening to the song of the birds. And as he did so he suddenly remembered what Violet Desborough had told him about the latter. "You will only hear it if you waken early or travel late," she had said, "for at noon and during the middle part of the day

even in the woods there is a strange hush of stillness which leads many travellers who sleep soundly, and who do not travel except in the middle hours of the day, to speak of Japan as a land without singing-birds."

With his thoughts of what Violet Desborough had said came thoughts of her. He lay and wondered whether she had already proceeded to Tokio or was still aboard the *Orient Queen* down in the harbour below, waiting to go on by it to Yokohama. He remembered she had said she was undecided what she would do until she got a letter from her aunt at the post-office on the Bund, which she knew would be awaiting her.

He wondered somewhat vaguely whether she would ever think of him, and then his thoughts trailed off in speculation concerning what might have happened had only Mrs. Thirston's officiousness not forced his hand, and—the voyage lasted no longer.

At length the light became stronger. Outside the sun was climbing up from the sea and over the hills to pour a flood of soft radiance into McKenzie's beautiful garden. San-to could be heard moving about humming some dirge-like song; and the boom, boom of an incoming steamer's siren signalling to the look-out on Iwo Shima floated up from the harbour and re-echoed amid the hills surrounding it. Then away to the west came the shriller scream of a whistle at the Imperial Dockyard, then the sound of a clock striking down in the Foreign Settlement.

Pushing the curtains of his bed aside, Somerville rolled out from beneath what he had already facetiously named the "meat safe," and looked out through the *shoji*.

Across the garden came the song of the grosbeak, and from a tree hard by a bullfinch was sending back a mocking warble. Down below lay the exquisite harbour, only just bathed in the soft but clear early morning light, which showed up every junk, *sampan*, and steamer on its surface as though they had been carved out of ebony or coloured woods. The trader that had hooted at Iwo Shima was just coming through the narrow passage of scattered islets with a long black trail of smoke behind her floating back to Takaboko.

But it was to the garden that Somerville's eyes turned. Near the path up which he had come the day before was a plum-tree in blossom, an exquisite tracery of blue-black twigs and branches thickly encrusted with nacre-tinted flowers. Beneath it lay a carpet of petals as though snow had fallen in the hours of darkness. And further down the path, where a tiny bridge crossed an equally diminutive stream, were the cherry-trees Katakuri San loved, with their blossoms just about to burst the gummy sheaths which held them.

Away on a bank under the bushes and diminutive trees, which bordered the garden on the hillside, was a patch of deep blue where a carpet of scentless violets lay in the green shade of cypress and pine.

As he was wondering at the exquisite beauty of this little garden, he heard the sounds of stirring in the adjoining room, with an accompaniment of McKenzie's tones speaking Japanese, and the more treble ones of Katakuri San.

A few minutes later and there was a rap on the *karakami* which served as a door leading into the passage, the sharp noise of a small bronze knocker meeting lacquered wood.

"*Ohayo!*" called McKenzie from outside.

"*Ohayo!*" replied Somerville, adding, after some thought, a polite phrase which Miss Desborough had taught him, "*Oagari nasai.*"

The panel was slid back and McKenzie appeared laughing at Somerville's pronunciation of the last two words."

"And how have you slept?" asked the former.

"First-rate," replied Somerville. "I have been awake since five, and lay listening to the birds and watching the light grow stronger. It is exquisite up here. But how is Madame?"

McKenzie smiled.

"I think," said he, "you may as well call her Katakuri San, at least when we are *en famille*. It is Yumoto's politeness which makes him call her Madame. You will soon begin to feel that your best manners are of quite an inferior kind when you come in contact with the people out here."

"So Miss Desborough led me to believe," remarked Somerville.

McKenzie glanced at the speaker narrowly, and then said, "And who's Miss Desborough?"

"A girl on the steamer. She's come out to live for a time with her people at Tokio. They're something in diplomacy; at least her uncle is, I believe."

"Pretty?" queried McKenzie.

"Rather," replied Somerville. "But why do you so particularly ask?"

"Because," said McKenzie slowly, "I thought there might be something in it. And then I should have to see that you don't, as Yumoto calls it, go nap on a *geisha* at the Fuku-ya in Maruyama-machi, or on one of the charming frequenters of the Sei-yo-tei in Hama-no-machi."

Somerville laughed a little uncomfortably.

"There is nothing in it, I can assure you. Miss Desborough is a very pleasant and intelligent young woman of whom I saw a good deal on the *Orient Queen*. She tried to teach me Japanese; and told me a lot of interesting things about the people and the country. That is all."

"So much the better," rejoined McKenzie. "For love is bad for Art, and you ought to do well out here. As yet Japan has not met with many interpreters, nor has the country or the people been over-painted."

Somerville smiled to himself. Even in the Quartier McKenzie used to enunciate his views in much the same way respecting Art and Love, but he had never practised either very seriously. And now, no

doubt, he did not consider that his position as manager of the Porcelain Works was of sufficient artistic moment to forbid his indulgence in the latter.

"You've got everything you want, I hope?" queried McKenzie, with a comprehensive glance round the bare room.

"Ye—es," replied his friend somewhat dubiously, "if I could have a wash."

McKenzie burst out laughing.

"There's your washing kit over there," he said, after a pause, pointing to a small bowl in the corner of the room, and a very ornamental but diminutive jar which stood beside it.

"That!" exclaimed Somerville in astonishment. "Why, it's not so big as the ridiculous tea-cup affair I found had sufficed for the ablutions of my predecessor in my room in the Rue de Madame. I can't get a wash in that thing."

McKenzie laughed.

"I'm afraid," said he, "you'll find everything out here on too small a scale at first. But another morning you can have a bath—a real 'tub' such as most decent Japs take every day or oftener, and hot enough to cook them, which does away with the necessity for much washing between whiles. But this morning Katakuri has annexed it; and I regret to say my own leaks. San-to's youngest girl fell into it about a week ago when it was out on the verandah, and they both rolled together down the steps into the garden. And when I extricated

her I found that the shock of the fall had knocked out two of her teeth and started several of the tub's ribs. It leaks like a sieve now, and I don't want to turn your floor into a swimming bath. If you want a 'tub' to-day you had better get out in the garden. The lake is just about big enough; but mind the gold fish don't eat you, for they didn't get a meal yesterday; Katakuri was so excited at the prospect of your arrival that she clean forgot to feed them."

"I'll cut the bath in the goldfish pond this morning," said Somerville, "and try to clean myself in the eggcup."

"Come out on the verandah when you're through," said McKenzie, "I hear Katakuri calling."

"*Oide nasai! Oide nasai!*" sounded down the passage as McKenzie disappeared. And then came the tones of Katakuri San's soft, gentle voice in what was evidently serious conversation.

Somerville hastened over the rest of his toilet, and pushing back the *shoji* strolled out on to the verandah.

The first thing he did was to search the harbour and waterside of the Bund for the *Orient Queen*. He would perhaps have been puzzled to exactly explain why he did so, but he felt the mail steamer, which had been his home for more than six weeks, was as it were the last link between the life he had led and that he was just about to lead. And besides, Violet Desborough possessed a greater interest for him than he had supposed.

As he leaned against the wooden post of the

verandah, which was painted a brick-dust red, and swept his eyes across the harbour he caught sight of the *Orient Queen* moored with steam up, her white hull gleaming like ivory in the morning light and silvery plumes of vapour issuing from her steam-pipes. These increased, and before long the tearing concussion of the safety valves reverberated in the still air, causing the fragile panels of the house to vibrate like tympani. Then a whistle sounded as the mailboat cast off her moorings and began to drift round majestically, with her bows pointing to the narrow channel between Iwo Shima and Kame-no-shima.

Somerville watched her gathering way, and leaving an ever-increasing, fan-shaped wake behind her, with a pang of regret. He strained his eyes uselessly in the vain endeavour to detect the identity of the people on her promenade deck, and was so preoccupied in doing so that he did not hear the soft shoo-shoo of Madame McKenzie's tabi-clad feet along the matting of the verandah.

"*Ohayo!*" she exclaimed, after gazing intently for a moment at Somerville's face in profile.

He started, and turned round.

Madame McKenzie stood in a little pool of sunlight, which struck in beneath the rafters of the verandah, a dainty little figure in a bright orange cotton *kimono*, into the fabric of which was woven a pattern formed by sprigs of plum blossom, a gayer garment than married women usually wore. But then McKenzie loved colour, and she to please

him had made a law of fashions of her own which had at first somewhat scandalised her relatives. Her face had that dainty artificiality which the use of rouge and powder produces, a delicacy of *nuance* which would have done credit to an English fashionable beauty.

To tell the truth this same complexion had taken her quite a while to build up, as she had sat that morning cross-legged on the white matting of her sleeping chamber in front of her tiny dressing-chest with its numerous miniature drawers of camphor-wood, and its circular mirror of polished steel swinging between scrolls of hammered bronze.

"It is well to do honour to one's honourable guest," she had said in a circumlocutory phrase to McKenzie.

But at the back of her little mind lay the desire to please, which had been inculcated in her for years before she became one of the most admired attendants at the Fuji-tei restaurant in Ima-machi, at which she had picked up a strange medley of American, English, and French phrases.

Somerville smiling, replied to her good morning in his best Japanese ; and then fell to a consideration of her as an artistic whole.

In that sense there could be no manner of doubt that Katakuri San was a success. He noted the pure oval of her face and the soft peach bloom upon the curve of her cheeks where the *poudre de riz* blended imperceptibly with the *rouge fin*. Her *kimono* was rather widely open at the neck, and displayed a

throat and a suspicion of her shoulders, which were plump and almost as white as those of a European. In fact they were only tinted with that golden glow which had often pleased his artistic sense when a beautiful Creole, named Hermione Doucet, was posing at Colorossi's. And where in many women "salt cellars" appeared, with her there were only dimples. He noticed, too, that where the wide, hanging sleeve of her *kimono* fell away from her upraised left arm, that the latter was well shaped and her hands small. And as to her eyes, they were the slyest and most mischievous he had ever seen. As Mademoiselle Katakuri San of the Fuji-tei Restaurant in Ima-machi, she had learned to use them professionally and effectively, as her capture of McKenzie testified, and as Madame McKenzie she did not make use of them less skilfully.

As she stepped to his side and gazed out over the rail of the verandah Somerville was able to appreciate the exquisite care which Katakuri San had bestowed upon both her complexion and her coiffure. Her mass of blue-black hair—coarse, it must be admitted, but lustrous—was piled up high upon her shapely little head, and in it were stuck some huge jade-headed pins arranged like the "spokes" of a conventional halo of semi-circular form.

"Your honourable body I hope itself has rested," she remarked, with a smile in a quaint mixture of English and Japanese idiom. "And that the noise of the sparrows has not too early wakened you."

Somerville was assuring her that he had slept well,

and that the twittering of the sparrows was altogether delightful, when McKenzie appeared cigarette in mouth, and with a copy of *Le Petit Journal* in his hand.

"I've only just got the mail that the *Orient Queen* brought," he said, "and reading this has made me quite homesick, or, rather, 'Quartier' sick. What times we used to have, Somerville! And the boys. We would have been going home to roost about this time in Paris after a 'fierce' night up on Montmartre or at Bullier. And Suzanne, what a girl! She would have made two of the biggest *geisha* down in the town. And then there was Hermione. Do you remember the morning we returned with her from the 'Quartz' Art Ball when our 'float' took the first prize, and she would insist on mounting the pedestal of the monument in the Place du Carrousel in her tiger skin and haranguing the *Sergents de ville*. Those were days, if you like; and I sometimes feel sick of the Porcelain Works (though I'm making money fast) and long for the old, bare, dirty studio in the Rue des Fourneaux, with its north light subdued by dust. All which has been suggested," he continued, "by this paragraph announcing little Pauline Desmoulins' suicide by charcoal. Poor little Pauline! I wonder how many time sketches I made of her whilst she used to pout and pretend that all artists were *cochons*, and posing was the most arduous of all the professions open to pretty girls."

Somerville smiled at McKenzie's vain regrets concerning the life he had abandoned. He had heard

of Pauline's mishap ere he left Paris. But such things were so frequent in the Quartier that a couple of months had served to dull any poignant regret he might have felt at the time of the occurrence.

Katakuri San looked at McKenzie fixedly. She could only gather from his speech that it concerned his former life about which he sometimes spoke to her, and—a woman.

In her little mind there lay dormant mostly, but occasionally very much the reverse, a dislike of foreign women, for so she classed all Europeans. And that McKenzie had spoken of women he had known she quite realised.

After a pause she ventured to say with a wonderful mispronunciation of Pauline's name: "Paw-leen Days-mow-len, who is she, Kumataka?" using the name which had been bestowed upon McKenzie on account of his piercing grey eyes.

"A girl I once knew in Paris, Katakuri," McKenzie replied.

"One you used to love?" questioned Katakuri San, with just a slight hesitation in her voice.

"No; one cannot love every woman!" said McKenzie, with a laugh. "Can one?"

But she made no reply, and only turned away her face and looked out into the sunlit garden.

Perhaps she remembered the numberless compliments of the frequenters of old Tai-shi's restaurant ere McKenzie had carried her off to his home, which lay almost under the shadow of Venus Hill.

If she had been a European she would have said, "Pauline Desmoulins—I hate her!" but she was not, and so she turned away and her eyes looked out into the garden, but of it or the town which lay beneath its boundary she saw nothing.

The two men chatted inconsequently for several minutes concerning the old life in the Quartier, which those who have lived in it can never banish from their memories. For life there is so strenuous, so full of alternating tragedy and comedy, that it becomes bitten into them like the lines of an etching upon a plate of steel or copper.

And all the while Katakuri San stood thinking of the woman in Paris and of Somerville, with eyes which saw neither the goldfish in the tiny pond beneath the verandah mouthing anxiously for flies and insects which were over-bold in their flights across its surface, nor the new wealth of blossom on the plum-tree she loved, that had come to replace the fallen petals of the night.

All three were disturbed by the creaking of the verandah as San-to came along it to announce that breakfast was prepared.

"*Kekko*," said McKenzie, without turning round. And then, as San-to, a wrinkled-faced figure, disappeared into the house, he laid a hand upon Katakuri San's shoulder. "Come," said he, "I am hungry, and our honourable guest will be wanting his breakfast."

She turned, and the face she showed to McKenzie, however sad it had been the moment

before when she looked out over the garden, was smiling. For from the revered pages of Kaibara's "Onna Daigaku" had she not learned in early girlhood that she should never offend her husband or male relatives, or even his relatives, with a frowning face? In this "Whole Duty of Women" (which a facetious American girl has called "The Whole Gospel of Women—According to Man") she had also learned many other things which make for domestic peace, even though they spell the effacement of individuality in women.

It was not easy for Somerville to squat cross-legged in comfort upon a *zabuton*, which McKenzie had by this time learned to do so easily.

"It is strange at first," said the latter, laughing at the wry face of his friend, "but now I would rather sit on a cushion at meals like a tailor than use a chair."

"You much pain in your honourable legs have," remarked Katakuri San as she was handing round the fish, tea, *mochi* (rice cake), and *meboshi* (dry salted plums), and noticed his discomfort. "Mister Bolton, him a great man say bad words at our abominable floor and *zabuton* at first, but now quite beautifully he shut up like Kumataka there."

McKenzie laughed, and explained that Mister Bolton was an engineer in the Naval Yard, some six feet in height and with legs rather disproportionately long, and that by "shut up" Katakuri San referred to the case with which he now managed to sit down.

"He is a great chum of Katakuri's," he explained. "She has a quaint way of estimating importance by size, and I think still believes Bolton was some one of great mark in England."

"*Nani?*" exclaimed Katakuri San, with an inkling that he was laughing at her, adding after a pause, as she comprehended what had been said, "*Wakarimasu*. Mister Bolton a very great man, a very important officer gentleman."

As she was speaking she rose to her feet, with an almost imperceptible straightening of her lower limbs, and pushing one of the *karakami* back in its grooves disappeared.

"She has gone to get some biscuits," explained McKenzie. "She has noticed that the *mochi* hangs fire with you. I have been trying to educate San-to into the way of preparing an English breakfast ever since I came up here, but to no purpose. And at last I am getting accustomed to all sorts of weird things which appear when Katakuri San and she have been putting their heads together."

Somerville looked somewhat despondently at the array of small dishes which were spread out in a semicircle in front of where Katakuri San had been sitting. He had been eating all the time (what he knew not) and he was still hungry.

"I suppose," said he at length, with a grim sort of smile, "there's not a restaurant down in the town where I could get a square meal?"

"There is," replied McKenzie, "in *Hama-no-machi*. But no one takes a square meal at this

time of day. And besides, Katakuri San would feel insulted beyond measure were you to scorn her breakfast, which I believe she thinks is quite European, by proposing to feed in the town."

"But," argued Somerville, "I've only had samples. And Heaven only knows of what! I can't starve, man. And I——"

Ere he could finish what he was about to say the *karakami* once more slid along in its grooves and Katakuri San appeared. Her face was radiant, and she bore in her arms a tin of American crackers, which were only produced on state occasions, or when she wished to give a lady visitor an astonishing treat.

"You much like these," she exclaimed, seating herself with the biscuit tin between her knees. "*Oagan nasai*, take much," holding out a tiny plateful, adding with the politeness which compels the Japanese host and hostess to depreciate the food offered, "They are very nasty *kashi*, but I hope they your honourable stomach will please."

Somerville laughed and took a handful of the crackers. He had had a good many makeshift and inadequate meals in the Quartier Latin during the four and a half years he had lived in Paris, but none stranger than the present one. Even French rolls and coffee, he thought, are a better preparation for a day's work than the small slices of raw fish, salted plums, minute cups of weak tea the colour of whisky, and the crackers with which he had been regaled, not to mention half a dozen other myste-

rious things whose nature he had not ventured to ask.

He ate a good many of Katakuri San's "nasty *kushi*" ere he felt the appetite which had been induced by the clear, fresh morning air had been in the least appeased. Had he glanced at his hostess instead of confining his attention to the crackers and conversation with McKenzie, he would have noticed that her face wore a look of almost plaintive anxiety as she watched the precious biscuits disappearing. To tell the truth, it was the last tin, and McKenzie, for economical reasons, never let her know that the fresh supply which presumably came each time from San Francisco or Vancouver actually emanated from his office, where he held stock.

At length Katakuri San felt that she could without impoliteness replace the lid; and when this was done her face resumed that expression of tranquillity with which she had been taught to endure buffets of fortune, lest her honourable Scotsman should think she were growing ugly and dismiss her with that ease of divorce which made her tenure of wifehood so insecure.

Down in the town below them a gong sounded in the Shinto Temple, recalling McKenzie to a realisation of the fact that he was already due at his office in the Porcelain Works.

"I must be going!" he exclaimed, getting up on his feet with a spring, which Somerville vainly attempted to imitate. "You had better walk down

with me, and spend the morning wandering about till tiffin, when I will meet you at Ichō-tei in Hamano-machi. We shall pass it on our way."

Katakuri San made a little *moue* of disappointment at McKenzie's proposal.

That morning, almost as soon as her eyes were open, she had decided how delightful a day she would spend looking on whilst Somerville unpacked his things. The cases which the coolies had staggered under and eventually placed in the room at the far end of the *engawa* (verandah) must surely, she thought, contain things of great interest and importance. And had not Kumataka himself told her very funny stories of her honourable guest's paintings, and how he made pictures of women appear in a very few moments and in brilliant colours on pieces of canvas tight on frames? And then, perhaps, she had thought, as she lay with half-closed eyes looking at the sunlight which came in through the *ramma* which McKenzie always left open for ventilation, in one or other of those immense packing-cases there might be some books with pictures in them. And Katakuri San was fond of pictures.

It was, therefore, with a sad heart that she watched Somerville disappear in company with McKenzie over the dip in the road which ran along the bottom of the garden.

San-to was not an exciting companion; Mio-San only smiled when her mistress talked seriously, and notwithstanding her honourable position which had

made "Miss Morning Glory," "Miss Snow," and "Miss Moon Face," who still entertained the visitors at the Fuji-tei, envious and her relatives proud, Katakuri San was often dull when McKenzie was away, and at times often longed for her old life of pleasure and excitement.



CHAPTER V

A BEE-STING HAS IMPORTANT RESULTS



MORE than a month had passed since Somerville had landed at Nagasaki, and by that time, with the adaptability of a cosmopolitan temperament, he had already begun to feel at home.

"He sheds his griffinhood readily," Yumoto had exclaimed one evening at the Hanazono Restaurant in Nishiyama Go. And the phrase exactly described the situation.

Long ere this the room which McKenzie had allotted to Somerville had been converted by him into a very fair semblance of a studio. And to Katakuri San's eyes it had become a chamber of mystery and delight. Never, certainly, had she been in so "very much filled up a *heya*." And, to

tell the truth, her native sense of orderliness and her delight in the crowd of different objects which so militated against such a desirable thing were in constant opposition.

In this room, which overlooked the most beautiful corner of the garden, and had a distant view of the bare scarp of Venus Hill, the triple summits of Shichi-men-zan, and the woods of the lower hills, Somerville was already gathering together bronzes, brocades, Inan ware, porcelain, and examples of Ban-ko pottery, things which he had longed for in Paris, and had vainly sought to obtain cheaply in the markets and curio shops of obscure streets.

A beautiful bronze mirror with a relief of bamboo sprays on its back, which he had found beneath a pile of *débris* in the shop of Hōshin in Funadaikumachi, stood in the corner of the room upon an upturned packing-case. And into this, the once dulled surface now brilliant as sunlight upon still water, Katakuri San was never tired of gazing.

In another corner, on a quaintly-designed bracket in the *toko-no-ma*, or recess, Somerville had placed a little bronze Buddha, into whose placid face its maker had put a whole world of expression. Before this figure, greened with age, which Katakuri San wished to clean off, Somerville once found her praying devoutly, and in a moment of curiosity he had asked her for what she prayed. She seemed about to tell him, but she turned away, her cheeks flushed as red as the petals of the tree peony in the garden, which, when they fell, looked, so Somer-

ville thought, like the brilliant-coloured lips of a *yujo*. She did not look at him, but said softly, "To tell one's prayers will make them not come true." And with that she had left the room.

When she had gone he felt that he had been about to pry into a locked and secret chamber, and had been checked just as the door was about to open. After all, he thought it was probably some trivial woman's secret. And yet? With a sudden comprehension the idea seemed to form in his mind that it was something to do with him.

After the first week of aimless but fascinating wanderings through the quaint streets and narrow alleys of the town, or away into the woods above Ippon Matsu, Somerville had settled down to serious work. In the room now known as the studio, which Katakuri San called with involution of phraseology "the *heya* where the honourable artist paints his august *kakemono*," he was ever discovering new schemes of lighting. The translucent *shoji* were a never-ending delight; manipulations of them gave him golden sunlight, strong diffused radiance, or a wonderful orange-coloured glow such as proceeds from paper lanterns in the dusk of evening.

He soon had his sketch-book full of studies of old San-to, Mio-San, and Katakuri San—the first named a quaint figure generally clad in a slate-blue cotton *kimono*, with a triangular cap of linen on her grey coiffure, and a face tanned to a reddish brown by sun and wind, and so deeply wrinkled that all

the emotions seemed frozen upon it. "Nothing, not even an earthquake," McKenzie once declared, "could add another line to San-to's expressive countenance."

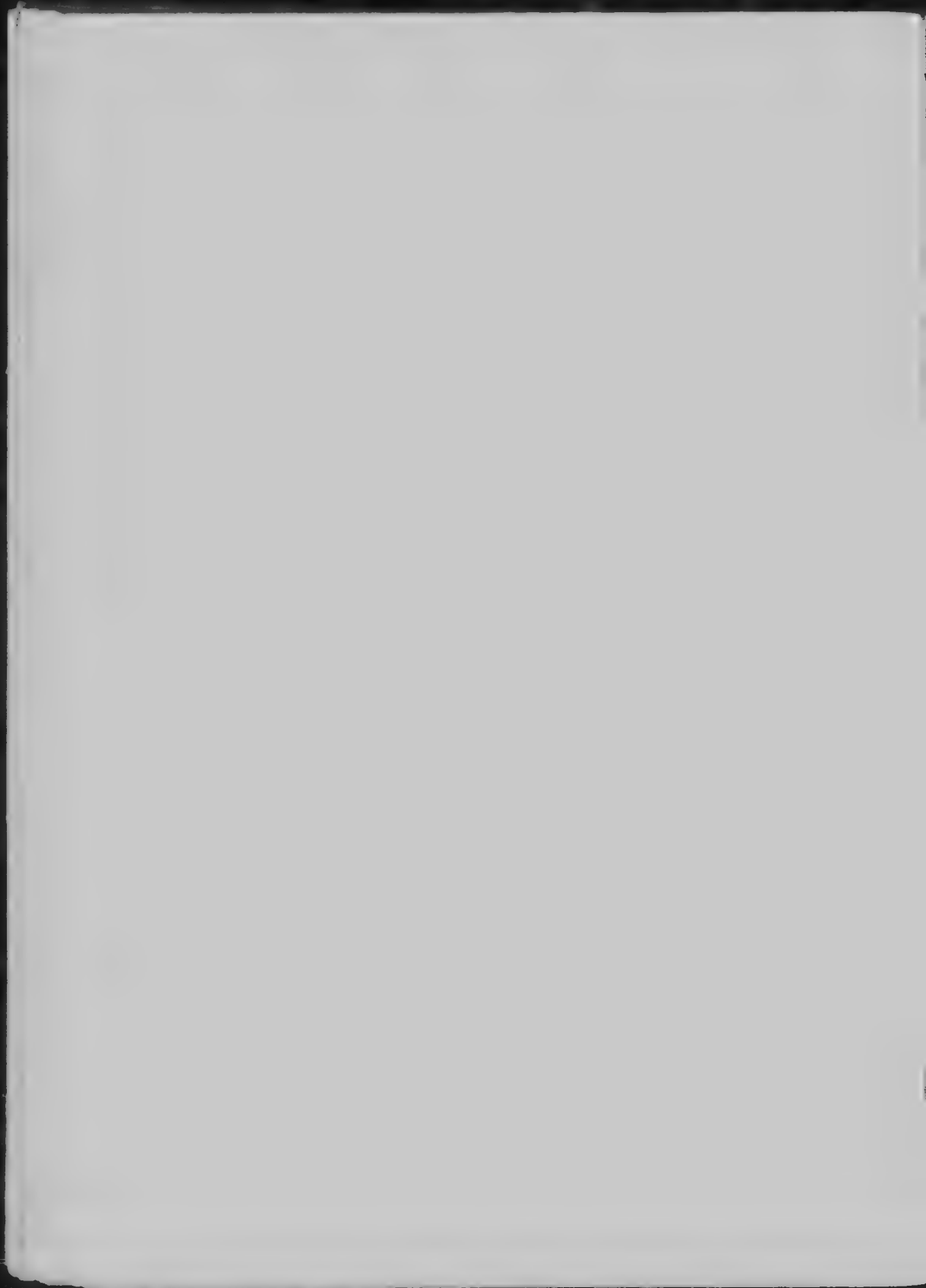
Mio-San was like spring. She was fresh and pretty, with cheeks like a sun-kissed peach, and an artless smile that would have played havoc with the hearts and purses of the officers off the mailboats had she been down at Hanazono Restaurant in the Nishiyama Go. But she was not, for her people were highly respectable florists who lived near the baths at Ureshino; and so she practised her wiles on Somerville, and one day came running to him in great distress for some of the wonderful stuff he used for *nomi* bites, slipping her *kimono* from off the plumpest of shoulders imaginable to show him where the bee had stung her.

But this piece of coquetry almost cost Mio-San her place on the spot, for her mistress, hearing her mingled laughter and sobs, came to inquire the cause and drove her from the room with unnecessary wrath, but not impolite language.

Somerville used his best Japanese in excusing her, "She is but a child," said he, "and a bee-sting is unpleasant. And how was it possible to cure the ill if one saw not the place which hurt?"

Katakuri San gazed at him with a slow, wide opening of her eyes, and an almost scornful curving of her lips. Then she said quietly, "One is no longer a child when one's eyes can look out as





Mio-San's, and when one is stung upon the shoulder for the need of healing."

Somerville looked at Katakuri San, and then he understood.

But all the same he remembered Mio-San's exquisitely dimpled shoulder, and thought what a sensation it would have created at Colorossi's.

Katakuri San was not appeased until he had let her see the sketch he had made the day before in the court of the Hon-ren-ji (Temple) in Nishi Nakamachi.

But as she looked at the picture and wondered how he had "caught the sunshine and put it down on the earth beneath the trees," her mind was evidently elsewhere. At last she said, "You Mio-San pretty, nice girl think?"

"Yes," Somerville admitted frankly.

Her face fell, but she persisted with her questioning although she felt as one who walked forward in the dark, fearing lest she should stumble into a bottomless pit.

"Your honourable mouth her altogether contemptible face has kissed?" she inquired, lowering her eyes from his face.

"No," replied Somerville slowly. "Why do you ask? Has not O Kumataka San told me often that there are no kisses in Japan?"

"No kisses," agreed Katakuri San, "till the honourable foreigner his august lips on ours places."

"But, O Katakuri San, the lips of Mio-San and mine have not met. And so?"

"You do not love her well," replied Katakuri San; "and no harm is done."

Somerville had been glancing at the speaker from beneath his brows whilst she spoke, and he noticed that her chagrin had mostly dissipated by the time she finished speaking.

Katakuri San looked at him for a moment with softened eyes, and then she turned slowly away.

"*Sayonara! Mata meirimas,*" she said, as she vanished on to the verandah through the open *shoji*.

"Goodbye, O Katakuri San," called out Somerville, opening his colour-box and preparing to finish a sketch of a coolie in which he was engaged. Adding as an afterthought, "Yes, come again soon."

When he was alone he began to think. The anger his little hostess had shown had been strange. Then, as he painted and saw the expressive face and bronze limbs of the coolie grow under the strokes of his brush, he remembered several incidents which had occurred during the last two weeks, and these suddenly assumed a new light.

Katakuri San had certainly shown a great predilection for his society of late. But he had not sought to analyse the reason, merely supposing, if he thought about the matter at all, that it was because of his "august skill in painting," or because she was fond of looking over his sketch-books.

Three nights ago, he now suddenly remembered, they had been climbing up the hill by the light of

their paper lanterns and a pale white moon, after spending the evening at the theatre in E-no-kidzumi-machi, when McKenzie and young Folkard had outpaced them. As they proceeded further up the hill the moonlight had become stronger and more silvery. He had remarked on the fact to Katakuri San, and she had replied in a soft tone of voice, "*Shizuka ni iki kutabiremashta!*"

And when as desired he had walked still slower she had said, "The honourable moon is risen. We can see our road without the lanterns."

As she stooped over to blow out her own a flood of yellow-reddish light lit her face and neck, throwing a bronze tint upon her beautiful black hair, and into her eyes had stolen a coquettish look which turned their usual softness into something quite different. When he had stooped to blow out his own their two heads had come suddenly close together, and Katakuri San had given a little sigh which no man who had ever known much about women could well misinterpret.

Her eyes glanced at him strangely ere the light of the lantern went out, and he was conscious that raising his head away from that inviting rounded cheek and leaving it unkissed was an effort, and one that the owner herself did not appreciate.

"You a very funny man," Katakuri San had exclaimed, handing him the lantern, with a little laugh, in which there was a trace of chagrin.

But when he said "Why?" she would not tell him.

She only shrugged her shoulders, as she had seen the wife of the French Vice-Consul do when annoyed, and walked on in silence.

When they had come to the turning where the narrow, rough-paved path to McKenzie's home branched off Katakuri San once more complained of fatigue. "*Sukoshi mate, kutabiremashta,*" she said wearily.

And when Somerville had stopped and turned round, with his face down the road and glancing out over the harbour, she laid a small hand on his arm. And then, as he did not resist it, she thrust it through his and leaned upon it.

When they went on again she did not remove it till they came to the small bamboo gate which led into the lower portion of the garden. There they found both Folkard and McKenzie awaiting them, and on seeing the latter Katakuri San had suddenly let go his arm. As they all four turned to pass in at the wicket the light of Folkard's lantern had fallen upon Katakuri San's face for a brief moment, and he had noted the red flush which stained her cheeks. Then the light from the lantern had flickered off amongst the trees and shrubs before McKenzie turned to speak to him, and in the moonlight Katakuri San's face looked no more flushed than usual.

Remembering her anger of half an hour ago the incidents he had now recalled bore a new and rather disquieting significance to Somerville.

All the morning, whilst he sat before his easel

painting away at the coolie, he thought of them as he heard Katakuri San either moving about or playing on her *samisen*. Once he caught her peeping at him round the corner of the *shoji*, and once he thought he heard her talking severely to Mio-San.

If he had but known what Katakuri San was saying to her little maid he would not have painted so steadily, nor have whistled softly to himself an air from "La Belle Hélène."

Mio-San, poor little soul, was very miserable all that day in consequence of the interview with her mistress. For had not the latter pointed out to her in picturesque language the enormity of her offence in troubling "the honourable English sir" over a miserable *hachi* (bee) sting upon her contemptible body?

Into little Mio-San's heart there crept a great blankness at the enormity of her offence, and with it was mingled a sadness that she must no longer seek to intrude her unworthy presence upon the honourable Englishman. If she did, had not Katakuri San told her she would be driven from the house? and then not even at meal-times would she see him. If, too, she were to lose her place as Katakuri San's servant, what lay before her? Ureshimo seemed to her a great way off, and her parents would be angry at her disgrace.

An hour or so after Mio-San had been "lectured," just as Somerville was blocking in the background of his sketch, he heard McKenzie's voice on the verandah, and soon after the gong went for tiffin.

Somerville had met with and known so many women in Paris that he was not, perhaps, so keenly observant of them, except as regarded their artistic merits, as he otherwise might have been. He noticed, however, that Katakuri San had attired herself with more than usual care, and that her *kimono* of apricot-coloured silk, embroidered with mauve irises, was one that she generally reserved for *file* days or special occasions. McKenzie remarked it. "Why are you so richly dressed?" he inquired in Japanese.

"I am going to pay a visit after tiffin to Madame Dubois at the Consulate," she replied. "She has a new dress from that wonderful place, Paris."

McKenzie laughed. He had found women in Nagasaki much the same as at home and in Paris. They dressed not to clothe themselves, but to excite the envy or to equal the splendour of other women.

"There is not much news," he said to Somerville after the meal was finished, and the two men, with Katakuri sitting on a *zabuton* at McKenzie's feet, were smoking and chatting in the verandah. "But that affair of Kynaston's I was telling you of the other night has ended disastrously. You know I told you he married old Sakaka San's daughter. His go-down is next Yumoto's, on the Bund."

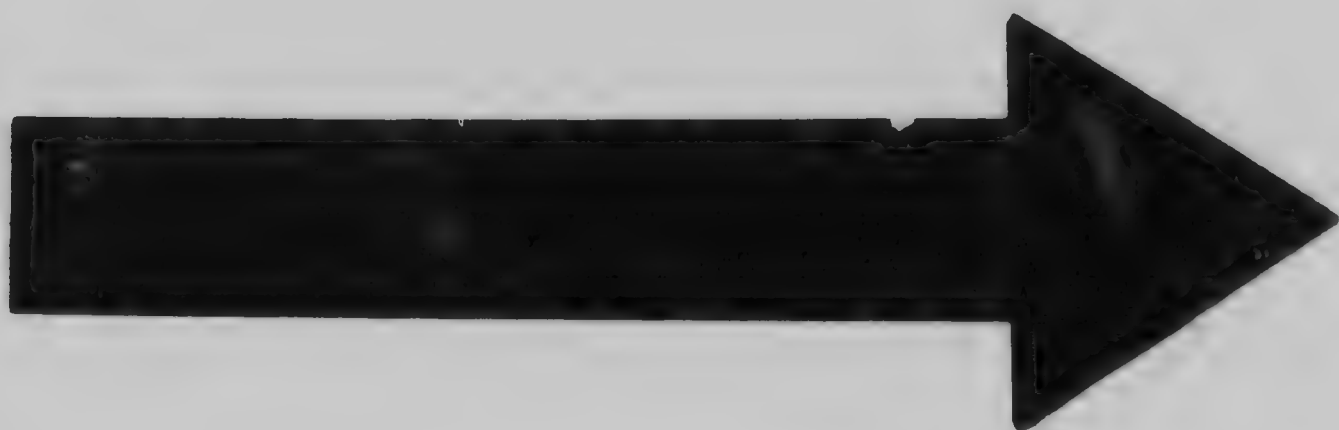
Somerville nodded assent, and as he did so he caught sight of Katakuri San's face. It had a look of intense interest upon it.

McKenzie continued: "About three months ago (they've been married about a couple of years now)

Kynaston saw a *geisha*, Ran San, in one of the waterside *chaya*, and since then little Asagao San has had to put up with second place. You saw her the other day down at Tanzawa's when you were hunting for that bronze *yatate* (pencil and ink case). Her face has lately been like that of a pale ghost. Well, it appears that Kynaston has not been home for several days, and this morning Asagao San's body was found washed ashore near the Imperial Dockyard. I hear that her people had urged her to remain with him when she complained of his treatment months ago. And she did ; but it broke her spirit, and the end has been that which so often happens.

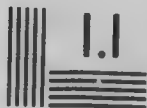
During the recital Katakuri San's face had undergone many changes, and when Somerville glanced at her as McKenzie finished speaking he was astonished to see the look of apprehension and alarm on it. Suddenly her eyes met his, and in an instant she gained complete control of her features, and she began to laugh—a harsh little laugh with no real merriment in it. For down in the depths of her heart a great dread had been growing whilst McKenzie spoke, although she could not understand all that he had said.

Perhaps the story of Asagao San's misfortunes suggested the thought to McKenzie, for he turned to Somerville and said laughingly, "Katakuri has not yet found you the little *geisha* you are to marry. But when she does, remember the end of Asagao San."



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Somerville smiled, and said something about being contented to remain as he was, whilst Katakuri San, without a change of colour, remarked, "He marry nothing, much nice more as he is."

"A very pretty compliment," exclaimed McKenzie, "O wise one. But some day, when he is wandering about the town, he will see a face that he likes, and then before you or I know he will be getting a house for himself."

If Katakuri San did not agree with this view she wisely said nothing, but started to tell McKenzie of some imaginary misdeeds of poor little Mio-San in pursuance of an idea which she had been turning over in her mind all the morning whilst she sat out on the verandah near Somerville's studio listening to him whistling and singing to himself snatches of songs he had sung in the cafés of Montmartre and the Boule Miche. But she said not a word of Mio-San's crowning indiscretion in regard to the *hachi* sting.

During the afternoon, whilst McKenzie was down at the office, Katakuri San paid several visits to the studio. She had had no intention of visiting Madame Dubois, although she had put on her most handsome *kimono* and a kerchief of finest *chirimen* (silk crêpe). With woman's subtlety she had put these things on to emphasise the gulf fixed between herself and Mio-San.

"It is very sad," said she to Somerville, "about Asagao San. But a woman will always rather die than be scorned." And as she spoke she looked at



THE TWO MEN OF THE LANTERN

Somerville with mockingly inviting glance. But just then he happened to be gazing intently at a patch of light on the verandah outside, and so he missed the true significance of her words.

Katakuri San had not served her apprenticeship at the Fuji-tei for nothing.

In the evening Yumoto came up from the town, as he frequently did, for a chat and a smoke upon the verandah. He, too, was full of the tragedy of poor little Asagao San. Somerville noticed that he looked very hard several times at Katakuri San whilst they were talking, and at length he said, with a strange smile which Somerville could not quite comprehend, "And you, O ku-sama (honourable lady of the house), what do you think of the finish of O Asagao San?" And then he added, "And thou, what would'st thou do in like circumstances?"

Katakuri San let her eyes fail for just a fraction of a moment, and then, with a noticeable pallor of face save where two hectic dabs of rouge glowed red, she raised them and looked straight at Yumoto, and in low, drawling tones said, "I should do the same, or—" and there she paused, and an almost threatening look came into her face—"I should seek another husband."

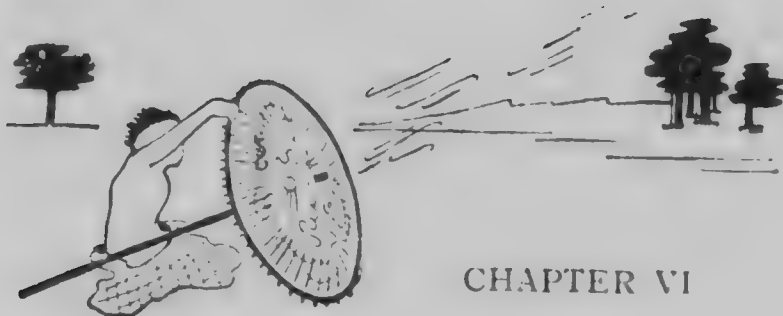
McKenzie started half up in the deck-chair in which he was reclining, and regarded Katakuri San curiously. With a superb control she threw open her arms as though to embrace him from where she sat, and then burst out into a peal of low, musical laughter.

"Yumoto San," said she, "is a philosopher ; he is always asking his questions of women and obtaining women's answers. Ah," she continued, with a dull glow in her eyes, "love has not left us with the red petticoat. Has it, O Kumataka San ?"

McKenzie exclaimed, "No, no, truly it has not." And seeing Somerville looked mystified he said, "When a girl marries she lays aside her red petticoat for ever, which is the symbol of love. Hence the proverb."

"Oh," exclaimed Somerville, and then the conversation stopped for a while, and Katakuri San sat regarding the men in turn with a face out of which she had driven all signs of emotion.

In her mind she was turning over and over with Oriental persistency every aspect of poor Asagao San's fate. It was almost incomprehensible to her, for her temperament had been hardened whilst she danced and sang and amused the frequenters of the Fuji-*tei* in the town below. She travelled back in thought to a certain night when, intoxicated with the applause of the *jokisen* officers, she had thought the whole world at her feet. And now the whole world as represented by McKenzie was a trifle dull at times. And from where she sat she could just see the yellow glare of the many lanterns swinging outside the restaurant in the busy Ima-machi.



CHAPTER VI

TWO WOMEN AND A MAN



EXT morning as Somerville was preparing to saunter away down into the town his thoughts, from a consideration of Katakuri San's strange conduct, wandered to Miss Desborough. To tell the truth, he had been a little disappointed not to have heard from her, as she had promised to write and give him some information concerning the best quarter of the town in which to settle if he should decide to proceed to Tokio.

As he came out on to the verandah, sketch-book and colour-box in hand, and a folding camp-stool slung over his shoulder, which always aroused the keenest interest in Katakuri San, who regarded it as a wonderful production, he found her lounging in a

deck-chair clad in a *yukata*, or bath wrapper, of bluish-grey cotton in place of her usually gay *kimono*, her plump, bare feet only partially thrust into *waraji* (straw sandals), and her tiny tobacco pipe between her lips.

As she saw him she slipped her left foot free of the *waraji*, and thrust it out into a patch of brilliant sunshine which fell upon the white matting like a golden lozenge. It was an exquisitely beautiful foot, as shapely as a baby's, with nails like nacre, for Katakuri San had not yet adopted the high-heeled Western shoes that were temptingly displayed by Akasaka in Teri-machi amid much more beautiful and quaint native *geta* (clogs) of lacquered wood. The artist in Somerville caused him to voice his admiration, and Katakuri San, into whose eyes stole a flash of pleasure, understood what he said.

"*Gomen nasai!*" she exclaimed, with a laugh, "you find my contemptible foot beautiful?"

Somerville glanced at her curiously. He was beginning to comprehend Katakuri San. But he answered nothing to her question.

She lay back in her chair and laughed again—a low, musical laugh. As she did so her *yukata* fell open at the neck.

"Is it," she asked, "as pretty as the shoulder of Mio-San? Come, have the politeness to tell me."

Somerville looked steadily at her. She certainly presented an adorable figure as she lay in the deck-chair with her mocking, smiling face turned up to

his. If Katakuri San had studied her pose it could not have been more effective. Perhaps she had. From her rouged and powdered face with its smile, which was becoming impudent, to the tip of her plump, *tabi*-less foot, thrust out so that its nails shone in the patch of sunshine, she was instinct with a grace of which Somerville was fully conscious.

His keen, critical eyes took in every line of the reclining woman's figure, every fold of the cotton gown on which were embroidered storks and willow-trees in orange silk. Then he said slowly—

"Your foot, O Katakuri San, is the most beautiful I have seen; it is like a half-open lotus flower in sunshine. But we cannot compare a foot with a shoulder. How is it possible?"

An expression of annoyance flitted across Katakuri San's face. It was quite momentary, but it did not escape Somerville's notice. She sat up in the chair, and, resting her face in her hands with her elbows on her knees, she replied—

"You say my foot is beautiful, but that it and the shoulder of Mio-San cannot be compared. See!" and a little shudder ran through her shoulders, as it does when a *geisha* changes one *kimono* for another. The cotton *yukata* slipped off them, revealing their shapeliness, and Katakuri San glanced up.

At that moment a voice came from the garden below the verandah. She started and lay back in her chair with her face turned away from Somerville, and on it an expression of chagrin.

"*Gomen nasai*. Here is a *chit*," called a man's voice.

Somerville stepped forward and glanced over the rail of the verandah. Down below stood a coolie, his bronze body bare to the waist, a coloured cloth knotted round his head, and a letter in his hand which he had just removed from the cleft of his carrying stick.

"It is for the honourable Mr. Somerville," he exclaimed, "and the honourable Mr. Yumoto has sent it."

Somerville stretched out his hand for the letter, which the coolie handed to him.

"How much to pay?" inquired Somerville, glancing at it.

"Three sen, honourable sir," replied the coolie.

"*Takusan takai!*" interjected Katakuri San.

"No, no," said the coolie. "It a very much hot run up steep hill to this honourable house."

Somerville threw the man a couple of coppers, which he caught dexterously and transferred to his cheek. And then, after making an obeisance which would have done credit to a Court official, he vanished at a quick trot down the garden path, his copper-coloured back gleaming in the sunlight.

Somerville sat himself on the rail of the verandah, and, conscious that Katakuri's San's eyes were regarding him, slowly turned over his letter.

It was addressed care of Mr. Yumoto, with an elaboration of polite phraseology, and he soon

recognised the handwriting as that of Miss Desborough.

With a glance at Katakuri San, who was watching his face closely, though she had allowed her eyelids to droop till the long black lashes almost lay upon her cheek, he tore open the envelope and commenced to read. It ran thus :—

“KOJI MACHI, TOKIO.

“May 10, 19—.

“DEAR MR. SOMERVILLE,—I am afraid that you will have thought I have forgotten my promise to write and tell you in which quarter of the city my uncle thinks you would be most likely to find suitable accommodation and a studio when you come. Such a thing as the latter in our sense of the word does not probably exist in Tokio. But one could easily be made if you found a house that you liked with a large room in it. The Japanese carpenters are so clever and ingenious that they would soon cut a hole in the roof for you as a top light ; or, in fact, build you the nearest approach to the English idea of a studio if you gave them rough sketches to work upon.

“I fancy that you will find the best accommodation in Moto-machi, and so does my uncle. But this you will be able to decide when you come. I hope we shall have the pleasure of seeing you before long, and my uncle bids me say that anything he may be able to do to assist you in any way he will be delighted to do, as some small return for your kindness and attention to me on the steamer.

"I am looking forward to turning over the pages of your sketch-books. Japanese life is so full of colour and romance that I feel sure you will have much that is beautiful to show me." And then followed a paragraph which caused Somerville to flush and smile, a circumstance which did not escape the notice of Katakuri San. "But if I am to have that pleasure, which I am looking forward to, I hope it may be possible for you to come to Tokio before long, as there are already rumours of change at the Embassy, and it is even possible that my uncle (who has been out nearly six years) may go home on long leave or even be transferred.

"I trust the information regarding the studio may be of service, though I fear it is somewhat incomplete and inadequate.

"With kindest regards,

"Yours ever sincerely,

"VIOLET DESBOROUGH.

"Leslie Somerville, Esq."

As he had been reading the idea had come into Somerville's mind that Violet Desborough was even anxious for him to go to Tokio. Her letter, of course, he admitted to himself, was perhaps not warmer in its expression of her hope of seeing him than ordinary friendship dictated. But—it was difficult for him to disabuse his mind of the idea that she had missed him. And then he laughed at himself rather contemptuously when he remembered what Miss Desborough had told him of her impos-

sible aunt and not less uncomfortable cousins. Perhaps she was only bored with them. He thrust the letter in his pocket and turned to Katakuri San.

"You have a letter," she said; adding, "From your honourable relations in England?"

"No," replied Somerville; "from a friend in Tokio."

"A man friend?" queried Katakuri San, with a slight deepening of her colour.

"No, a woman."

As he said this he tried to look into her eyes, but she kept them lowered.

She gave a little start, and then she said, "One of your honourable countrywomen on the mailboat?"

"Yes. But I must go, or I shall do no painting to-day, and the blind beggar who is waiting for me at the foot of the steps of the Temple of O-Suwa will have got tired and gone away."

"Let him tire," said Katakuri drawlingly. "Stop a little more time with me. I wish with you to speak."

Somerville looked at her. There was something almost feline in her eyes and pose—something which made him suddenly wonder why McKenzie had fallen in love with her, though she was beautiful. But perhaps, he thought, he knows how to tame animals.

"I must go!" said he, and with a nod he ran lightly down the steps of the verandah and walked away down the garden path.

As Katakuri San watched him disappear behind the old plum-tree, now a mass of pale green leaves unbroken save here and there by a few belated blossoms, her eyes gleamed with a bronze light around the irises, and there were marks of her nails in her soft, plump palms when she unclasped her fingers. At Fuji-tei in Ima-machi men had not left her when she bid them stay.

The one who had gone away down to the town without even throwing a glance behind to see if she were watching him was a puzzle to her. Her experience of Europeans had been, it is true, fairly extensive, but those she had known had been much of a sort, until she met with McKenzie—idlers, officers off the mailboats, naval officers from the warships of "friendly" Powers which came into Nagasaki to coal or repair. And Katakuri San was only equal to tackling the average man, and to her chagrin, Somerville apparently stood outside that category.

When she heard the bamboo wicket rattle to, she lay back in her chair to think, having first refilled her tiny silver pipe, which had a bowl scarcely as large as a child's thimble.

In the garden no birds were singing, even her uguisu in its bamboo cage at the end of the verandah was silent, but there came the hum of bees and the silken whirr of the wings of dragon-flies hovering above the surface of the little pond below the verandah near where she sat.

Katakuri San's thoughts were not pleasant ones if

one might judge them by the expressions which flitted across her face. A strange mercenary little soul dwelt in her, and now she was wondering why Fate had permitted her to see McKenzie before she had met Somerville, who was so much handsomer, more interesting and, she fancied, richer. Whilst she was so lonely, after her gay life of the tea-house, when McKenzie was down at his office at business, she would have been able to have watched Somerville at work, and to have gone into the town with him, even to have done something to assist him by carrying his colour-box or that astonishing folding-chair.

Although Katakuri San was mercenary, she was a little woman in whom the artistic sense was strongly developed. Any one could see that in a moment by her choice of colours, the way she did her wonderful blue-black hair, the perfection of the bow in which her *obi* was tied. Fate had not been kind to her, she decided. In the beginning she had thought it a wonderful thing to keep house for the honourable manager of the Porcelain Works, and her selection by him for that important post had caused several of her rival *geishas* at Fuji-tei many heart-burnings. Now there was somebody else. Katakuri San's training had not been of that kind which made her loth to admit such a thing even to herself. She smiled a little bitterly at the idea, that was all, and rather contemptuously when she thought of McKenzie and his blindness to the fact. Her guileful coquetry of half an hour or so ago was

merely a continuance of many previous attacks upon Somerville of a like nature, the thing that caused her most chagrin being his calm indifference to that side of her nature. "His heart is as cold as the water of Katsura-gawa when the snow from off Fuji-san is in it," she said to herself over and over again.

Musing thus she fell asleep, and so she did not see or hear Mio-San come along the verandah from the kitchen and enter Somerville's studio.

It was a strange tragi-comedy which was being played out in that dwelling on the Nagasaki hillside—mistress and maid with the same thoughts of and feelings concerning the artist that Fate and friendship had conspired to introduce into their lives. But not quite the same, after all. For whereas the love of Katakuri San was selfish, calculating, and evil imagining, that of the poor little *musumé*, Mio-San, was pure and beautiful in its simplicity. Many a Western maiden has a hero in the recess of her heart when in her natural growth love at length unfolds, and this is what had happened to the *musumé* of the East.

Her feet, in thick cotton *tabi*, made no noise as she entered the room, although the verandah had creaked and caused her to start lest her mistress should discover her; and she trod so lightly that none of the ornaments shook as they sometimes did. To her this studio was a sort of temple, and so it seemed the most natural thing in the world for her to kneel on the white matting in front of the *toko-no-ma*, where another and larger image of Buddha had

lately been placed by Somerville to keep the little bronze one company.

As she knelt there her eyes were fixed upon the idol's face, the expression of which seemed to indicate that it was above troubling about human longings, sins, or desires.

"O Thou, whose eyes are all-seeing and kind, whose eyes are full of pity and of sweetness. O Thou lovely one with the beautiful face, with the beautiful eyes. O Thou for ever shining with a Glory no power can excel. Thou Sun-like One in the course of Thy mercy, hear me," prayed Mio-San, adding a request that her mirror might never dim, which was to ask that her soul might never become sinched or unclean. And though her eyes were fixed humbly upon the face of Buddha, that half-whispered prayer was sent into the bright, pure air of the blue heavens above her to the feet of a more human God than that of bronze or stone. What recked little Mio-San if her prayers were irregular? It was the cry of her heart just awakening into a warmth of life and love like the exquisite blossoms outside in the garden did under the caresses of the all-embracing sunshine.

And then, when she had finished, she knelt awhile without articulate words, or even thoughts, thinking not of the smiling, benign face of the Buddha upon which her eyes rested, but of that of Somerville, who to her was a radiant being shining above the splendours of all gods.

How long she would have knelt thus who can tell? Suddenly she heard a voice calling to her somewhere behind the *karakami* at a distance.

"Mio-San! Where art thou? Come here. Make haste." It was San-to calling. And San-to was old, and apt to be impatient if her call were not answered at once.

As she rose from her knees with a start she heard another voice drawling out sleepily, "*Doshtu?*" But Mio-San dare not go out to her mistress through the open *shoji* on to the verandah to tell her there was nothing the matter. For she was on forbidden ground.

She pushed back one of the *karakami* softly; near it hung Somerville's coat. Mio-San's hand crept out stealthily towards it, and then, ere she vanished through the open panel, the hem of that travel-stained garment was pressed for an instant to her lips.

"*Kayuku! Kayuku!* Mio-San! Mio-San! Where art thou, Mio-San?" accompanied by picturesque maledictions, but not curses, called San-to.

But Mio-San did not answer. Her mistress was awake and had sharp ears, and Mio-San knew if she called out she would betray where she was.

And all this time Somerville had been sitting in the small patch of shade near the wide flight of steps which led from the gardens up to the O-Suwa Temple of the Bronze Horse in Nishiyama Go, busily painting a blind beggar-man and his tiny grandchild with quaintly smiling face. Soon a



Pushing round a blind beggar man and his two grand-
children, smiling face. Page 84

little crowd had gathered to watch him paint. But he was getting used to crowds, and most of their polite and interesting comments were as Greek to him. He comforted himself with the thought that if the Japanese were as polite a race as McKenzie and Folkard asserted, the onlookers would be saying nothing offensive.

If he could have understood the remarks they passed he would have had a high opinion of their intelligence, because one and all seemed to think the sketch a wonderful production except a tiny man in a very tattered *kimono*, who, with the literalness of his race, wondered why the honourable painter gave the blind beggar four fingers on his left hand when there were but two!

"It is your contemptible mind!" ejaculated a bright-eyed old woman, "which cannot see that the honourable artist is too kind to let one see that old Maruyama has two less fingers in number than other people."

Thus rebuked the tattered one slunk away into the back row of interested spectators.

Somerville worked on, thinking of nothing except the old man before him, whose faded snuff-coloured gown and ruddy, wrinkled countenance made so excellent a contrast to the bright blue cotton *kimono* and childish face of his little guide, till all at once some one speaking brought Katakuri San to mind. The voice was so similar in inflection that he turned round on his camp-stool half expecting to see her.

After all it proved to be but a *geisha* from one of

the *chaya* in the Park. But she had the same queer, drawling voice as Katakuri San and the same eyes. And when, after looking over his shoulders and saying something to him, the meaning of which he could not catch, she went away along the pavement and commenced to ascend the steep flight of steps in the full blaze of the afternoon sunlight, he noticed that she had the sensuous walk of Katakuri San as well as her eyes and voice.

It was quite late ere he finished. The little crowd had thinned and thickened again with fresh on-lookers several times before he was satisfied. And the little *musumé* had fallen fast asleep, slipped down like a Japanese doll with her limbs straight out in front of her from the waist, and her tiny head with its linen band round her brow bent forward in uneasy repose. She was so quaint a conceit that Somerville spent ten minutes putting a tiny sketch of her on the margin of his drawing. And then the booming of the monastery gong awoke her with a start, and reminded him that he had promised to meet McKenzie at the corner of the Park and walk home with him.

The little *musumé* sat blinking her eyes at the fast-sinking sun as he put his things together.

"*Arigato, arigato! Sayonara!*" she exclaimed in a soft, low voice as he slipped a two-sen piece into her little brown hand.

"*Arigato!*" said the old man, in hardly more harsh tones. And then as Somerville said "*Gokumo sama,*" two words of thanks he had mastered from

his phrase-book, the beggar smiled the quiet, plaintive smile of the sightless, and murmured his thanks over and over again as he slipped the silver which had been given him into his pocket.

McKenzie was waiting in the corner of the Park near the *chaya* of the "Welcoming Willow."

On the way up the steep road the two men did not talk much. McKenzie was tired, for the day had been hot and his office at the works, shut in by other buildings, had been like a little oven. Somerville was thinking of Katakuri San.

He glanced several times at McKenzie and wondered if he knew the sort of woman she was. If he did he kept the knowledge to himself, and if he did not it was certainly not easy for him (Somerville) to be the medium of enlightenment. As they trudged up the last bit of the road, where it ran along the hillside above a row of villas and permitted a magnificent view of the harbour below across the roofs and trees, McKenzie spoke.

"I cannot quite make Katakuri out," said he, as though it were the most natural remark in the world. "She has taken a ridiculous dislike to Mio-San, and wants to get rid of her. Decent girls are not easy to get in Nagasaki." And then after a pause he turned to Somerville and inquired, "Do you know the reason?"

For the moment the latter was almost thrown off his guard, but he managed to consider the position and reply without a very appreciable hesitation.

"No," said he quite calmly. "How should I? Mio-San seems a nice obliging little soul, but perhaps she is not so to O Katakuri San."

"Oh no, I suppose you wouldn't know," replied McKenzie. "Only, as you've been about the place whilst I've been stewing away down in that infernal mouse-trap of an office, I thought you might perhaps have heard or noticed something."

Somerville had heard and noticed a good deal; but the situation he realised was already becoming sufficiently delicate without the need of a premature *dénouement*. And so he merely repeated that he was in happy ignorance of the cause of the domestic disquietude.

As they were coming up the garden path both men were startled by loud voices from one of the rooms opening on to the verandah.

Somerville recognised Katakuri San's voice raised to an unusually high pitch in anger. What she was saying he could not gather, for she was pouring out a flood of colloquial Japanese, of which five years' residence might scarcely have supplied him the key.

Both the men paused, and then McKenzie said something under his breath which was not Japanese, for the language is deficient in such words.

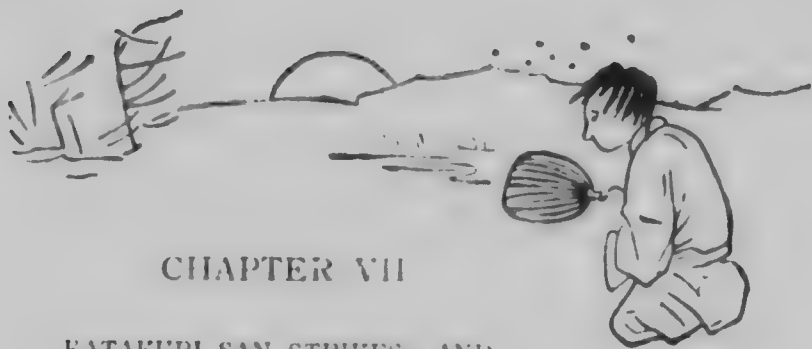
"What's up?" asked Somerville, glancing at McKenzie's face, which had turned very pale.

"Katakuri," said McKenzie, with a rather harsh laugh after a pause, "is telling Mio-San that she has been making love to you."

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Somerville flashed a look into his companion's face, and said with all the coolness he could muster, "And Mio-San?"

"I did not catch what she said," was the reply.



CHAPTER VII

KATAKURI SAN STRIKES—AND
AFTERWARDS SEES A GHOST



THAT evening, whilst the men were chatting and smoking on the verandah, Katakuri San was terribly frightened. Something in McKenzie's face and something he said to Somerville made her suspect that her attempts at intrigue with the latter had not quite escaped the former's notice. She had been shaken, too, by her stormy interview with Mio-San, whose innocence of evil intent so contrasted with her own demeanour that she felt insensibly beaten and lowered even though the nominal victory had been hers.

As she sat in the deck-chair, which she had occupied when Somerville left her earlier in the day, she listened intently to the conversation of

the two men, although she could not comprehend all they were saying.

During the meal which they had just finished Somerville had been turning over in his mind the events of the day, and it had not taken him very long to foresee that unpleasant events were likely at any moment to arise were he to prolong his stay with McKenzie. He had had no opportunity of endeavouring to find out from the latter what had been the substance of Mio-San's reply to her mistress's attack upon her, for that the latter had attacked the little maid most bitterly he had no doubt at all, and he fancied that even if the opportunity had occurred McKenzie was not likely to tell him what he wished to know.

"What a little devil the woman is!" he mused as he watched Katakuri San reclining in the deck-chair, and without seeming to do so regarding both himself and McKenzie out of the corner of her dark, almond-shaped eyes. "I am almost sorry for McKenzie, though she is so pretty and seems to suit him well enough."

Just as he was thinking of broaching the subject of finding a studio and rooms, or a house, McKenzie gave him the chance of introducing the subject.

"Next month," said he, "is Yasaka-jin-ja, and you'll have plenty of work the three days during which it lasts. You've never seen a Fair like it. Such crowds of the country folk flock into the town, and some of them are types you'd have to hunt a long while to find in Nagasaki except at this

particular time of the year. If I'm too busy in the day you'll have to get Katakuri to show you the sights. . . ."

Somerville glanced at Katakuri San, who was, as he could see, about to make one of her elaborately polite speeches, in which she would assure him that if he was willing to put up with her altogether contemptible company she would bring all the most unworthy sights of the Fair to the notice of his august and honourable eyes.

But ere she could do so he said, "I'm no end obliged to you, old fellow, for having me here taking up your time and rooms so long. But I've been thinking lately that it has been too bad of me to stay so long. I received a letter this morning from Miss Desborough (the girl I met on the steamer), who says I ought to put in some time at Tokio . . ."

"There's surely no hurry for that," broke in McKenzie, who remembered that Somerville had shown no very great enthusiasm concerning Miss Desborough when speaking of her before. "I thought you'd put in at least three months with us, and you haven't been here quite two."

Katakuri San appeared about to speak, for she sat up in her chair and her red lips parted. But she apparently altered her mind, for they closed again, and with a glance at Somerville which he could not misinterpret she lay back and closed her eyes.

"That's all very well, and you're awfully kind,"

replied Somerville, "but I've about made up my mind. You see, I think I shall run up to Tokio for a week or two a little later on, and before doing so I should like to get a little place here that I could come back to whenever the humour to do so took me."

"I believe," exclaimed Katakuri San without opening her eyes, "that our honourable friend means to marry or find a *geisha* to keep house for him. I saw him looking with bright eyes at O Matsu San the other night at the Hashi Moto. But she not really pretty, not good at all."

The two men laughed, for Miss O Matsu San's flirtations were rather notorious.

After a pause, during which Katakuri San looked furtively through her lashes at Somerville, he said, "No, O Katakuri San, O Matsu San has not pleased my contemptible eyes in that way. Nor do I wish to marry. But your august eyes must long ere this have tired of seeing my inferior presence in your beautiful house."

Katakuri San winced.

This Englishmen when he fenced with her so often won. Only once during the last few weeks had she thought she had conquered him, when with almost shameless coquetry she had forced him to understand her meaning. But even then she had been defeated; by chance perhaps, but nevertheless defeated. And now that she saw him determined to pass from the sphere of her possible influence she would have spoken to detain him, but when she

glanced at his face and that of McKenzie she feared to do so.

"What nonsense!" exclaimed McKenzie when Somerville finished speaking. "Neither of us are tired of you, and you had better make up your mind to remain here till you leave for Tokio. Even then, we will gladly store your things till you return. Whatever's the use of house-rent going on, even if one is such a plutocrat as you bid fair to be, whilst one is away. Come, let us settle that you remain here for the present."

Somerville did not reply for a minute or two; and Katakuri San breathed a little more quickly and opened her eyes sufficiently to see his face clearly from beneath her lashes. If only he would stop! After to-morrow there would be no one to attract his attention from her; no one to spy on her movements; no menace to her schemes. And yet, as the thoughts flashed through her mind, whilst she waited for his answer to what McKenzie had suggested, a strange upbraiding voice of an almost dead conscience seemed to accuse her. That such a thing should stir in her after all she had done and said and thought during her life at the Fuji-tei caused her additional alarm, which grew each moment—that terrible affright at the future which seizes women like her at times in a grip of icy chill. She shivered slightly, and perhaps it was this almost imperceptible movement which recalled Somerville.

"You are awfully good," said he, addressing

McKenzie, "but I must stick to my original intention. It is the better plan, looked at all ways. It's by no means settled that I am going to Tokio. Anyway, I think it unlikely that I shall go for a couple of months. Isn't there some one down in the town who knows when and where houses are to be let? I thought, when I was wandering about in Tsukichi-machi the other day, I saw a board up on which was 'Very fine Houses to Let, Cheap and Good. Will keep wet weather dry.'"

McKenzie laughed.

"Oh, that's at old Kusatsu's," he replied. "If you will insist on leaving in this way, he's about as likely a person as any to find you what you want."

"I will go to see him to-morrow," said Somerville.

It was getting late, and the moon, which had been slowly climbing up over the hills whilst the men talked, had now breasted the ridge and poured a flood of radiance down into the harbour and town, making the reddish-orange glow of the latter dim perceptibly.

Out in the roadstead many lights were twinkling, throwing long, thin threads like incandescent wires upon the dark surface, with broader patches of radiance where the stronger lamps of the mailboats and larger steamers swung lazily with the tide. The sounds of the town came softened to the sitters on the verandah, like the hum of bees or insects, and the whirring chirp of the cicadæ sounded monotonously from the garden below.

Somerville and McKenzie both smoked in silence,

occupied by thoughts of Katakuri San for several minutes; and then the latter suddenly rose and, with an almost icy "*Kon bon wa*" to Somerville, went away along the verandah to her room.

"That row with little Mio-San seems to have upset Katakuri San somewhat!" exclaimed McKenzie as he watched her disappear. "What cats women are to each other when they have a rumpus! I can't for the life of me quite get at the bottom of the affair. All Katakuri will say is that Mio-San was impudent to her. Heaven only knows what about." And then he added as though speaking to himself, "Katakuri has a queer devil of a temper when she's roused."

Somerville looked at McKenzie sharply, and then he laughed. "Do you remember that little Pole, Sophie Kolniwitz, who used to sit for Valmy?" McKenzie nodded. "Well," Somerville continued, "sometimes Katakuri San reminds me of her. What a strange thing it is that women, black or white, East or West, run in types! Whatever colour their skin, they are angels or devils."

McKenzie did not reply. He was thinking what a mixture of both he had installed in his house.

Meanwhile Katakuri San, in the privacy of her own room, stood trembling and unnerved. One of those fits of remorse and fear, which so often assail women mingled with their chagrin, had seized upon her as soon as she was alone. With a woman of her type it could not be an awakening of conscience.

As she had sat watching Somerville and

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McKenzie's faces and recalling the incidents of her treatment of Mio-San, there had suddenly flashed into her mind the words of an old saying in which her naturally superstitious nature made her half-believe. It ran thus, "*Kagami ga kumoru to tama-hu ga kumoru.*" With that saying came terrible, accusing visions of Kwakko Jigoku, where her soul would burn till cleansed of all impurity.

With fingers which trembled she commenced to untie her *obi* and slip her shoulders out of the beautiful *kimono* of purple silk which, as he had once admired it, she had put on for Somerville's especial benefit.

Even her own shadow thrown dimly upon the white matting by the flame of the tiny oil lamp placed on a shelf before the image of Buddha frightened her horribly. She longed to cry out and summon McKenzie. But what could she tell him? Could she say to him, "See, I am an evil woman whose soul is smirched, and whose mirror has become dim?" He would either laugh at her, or if he saw anything lurking behind her words he would look at her with those quiet eyes of his blazing with the dull, hot fire of anger that she had seen once or twice before and could never forget.

The mirror was there on its lacquer, box-like stand, swinging between scroll-work of bronze, with tiny drawers beneath it, in which lay all those tawdry artifices by whose aid she sought to enhance her facial charms—the rouge, the *poudre de riz* the foreign chemist in Funatsu-machi had obtained for

her from Europe; the gold with which *yujo* gild their lips, the use of which McKenzie had long ago forbidden. It had a strange fascination for her, this mirror with the trellis of young bamboo shoots ornamenting its back, and its face gleaming like polished pewter. She hesitated, and then after a moment or two leaned forward and gazed into its depths.

Was it that her eyes were dim with fright, or was it the surface of the mirror that was dulled? she questioned. She looked again, leaving go of her *kimono*, which slipped down with a soft, caressing motion off her amber shoulders.

The lamp on the bracket above the mirror swaled as a draught of night air seized the tiny flame in a mimic vortex, and as Katakuri San started forward as though to approach and gaze into the mirror, her silhouette appeared cast upon the grey-coloured *karakami* which formed the walls.

She looked at the mirror again, and then her knees gave way beneath her as she was about to lean forward and gaze more closely at it, and she started back and away from it. The terrible fright which possessed her grew stronger and stronger in her heart. But she felt that she must see. It was the dominating idea in her mind. She must see. Beads of sweat broke out upon her forehead, and when she wiped them away with her hand the latter felt chill. She paused for a moment or two to gather her courage, and then she again crawled forward, with the skirt of her *kimono* trailing behind



With wild wide, big eyes, Katakun says, "I am not a clown. I am a clown."
 after her "For a very long time."

her on the snowy matting like the tail of one of the lizards which sunned themselves on fine days on the rocks at the edge of the goldfish pond.

In the dim light of the room she crawled forward inch by inch till she was close to where her mirror stood. Then once more she hesitated. She dare not look, but she must. The very demons who would roast her soul in Kwakkto Jigoku seemed to be burning her head now.

She raised herself till her face was on a level with that of the mirror. Her breath came quickly. "Is it that my eyes are dim, or what?" she asked herself in affright.

She could see nothing in the mirror's face, for there was a mist over its surface, and it was dim. "*Kagami ga kumoru to tamashiga kumoru,*" a voice seemed to whisper at her elbow.

With wild, wide-open eyes Katakuri San looked once again. Horror seized hard upon her. The voice spoke again, and a shrill cry rang out on the night air—a piercing, night-cleaving cry as of a drowning woman.

"Good God! What is that?" cried McKenzie, jumping to his feet and rushing along the verandah.

Without waiting to find the holes for his fingers in the *shoji* he dashed the panels along in their grooves, and entered the room. In the dim light he could not see at first, but in a moment he caught sight of Katakuri San stretched full length on the white matting like a huge dead moth, the sleeves of

her garment, from which her arms had slipped out, like wings outstretched beside her.

Somerville came close behind.

"Get some *sake*, quick, and a light!" shouted McKenzie, stooping at Katakuri's side.

Somerville rushed along the verandah and almost fell over San-to, who had come out from her quarters to see what was the matter.

"Brandy *sake*, *nomi midzu*, *narutake kayaku!*" ejaculated Somerville, and San-to vanished, returning a moment later with the brandy and a jar of water.

Meanwhile Somerville had lighted a kerosene lamp which hung in his studio, and with that in one hand and the brandy in the other he hurried back to McKenzie's room, followed by San-to carrying the water.

Katakuri San still lay unconscious on the floor, although when the stronger light from the lamp Somerville carried fell upon her it was evident, from the twitching of her eyelids that she was about to revive.

McKenzie raised her head and forced some of the brandy between her closed lips, which looked like two scarlet wounds across her deathly-pale face. Somerville sprinkled some water on her brow, and San-to kept up a crooning wail all the time, punctuated by expressions of terror.

In a few moments Katakuri San opened her eyes and murmured something which Somerville failed to catch, but which made McKenzie set his teeth

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hard and turn away from her for a moment. He too had heard the saying concerning the mirror and a woman's soul, and Katakuri San's words cut him like a whip.

When she opened her eyes fully and caught sight of the mirror she shivered violently.

A flood of light fell upon the polished disc from the lamp Somerville had brought, and a quivering oval reflection danced for a moment upon the ceiling.

McKenzie noticed the terror with which Katakuri San regarded the mirror, but he said nothing.

To Somerville the cause of Katakuri San's collapse was incomprehensible, but then he neither knew the saying, nor the hold that superstition had upon her empty little mind.

Katakuri San still lay upon the floor with her bluish-grey *yukata*, which San-to had hastened to throw across her shoulders, enveloping her. She was less unconscious than the two men supposed. And already in her mind the question was formulating itself as to whether McKenzie had any suspicion of the reason for the terror which had seized upon her and forced that shrill, terrible cry from her unwilling lips. But in his face, which looked hard and pale in the uncertain and feeble lamplight, there was nothing to indicate what he thought or what he might have discovered.

In a little while Katakuri San heaved a deep sigh as though recovering from a swoon, and raised herself to a sitting posture. Her face was still

deathly pale, and some of the paint from her red lips had smeared her chin, making the rest of her face look the more ghastly.

"I was very much frightened," she explained in a low voice, in Japanese, looking straight at McKenzie, who had stood up, to see the effect of her words "I thought that a ghost looked over my shoulder whilst I was undressing, and I was frightened."

"What sort of a ghost?" asked McKenzie.

But Katakuri San would not or could not tell him.

"San-to shall remain with me," she said after a pause, "for I wish to see no more *bake-mono* or *yama-oba* to-night."

When the two men had left her Katakuri San became lost in thought. She was not quite recovered from her fright, but whilst San-to was with deft, yellow fingers rearranging her mistress's disturbed coiffure she had satisfied herself that at all events now there was nothing to obscure the purity of her mirror's face. But of the purity of her soul who could speak?

Both the men were silent for some minutes after they had returned to the far end of the verandah. McKenzie was thinking a little contemptuously of Katakuri San's terror and its possible cause. He knew little or nothing of its real one, of the events of the past few weeks, or of her attack upon and cruel treatment of Mio-San. To him, ignorant of all these things, it was just a piece of weak, womanish superstition. And when, as he did, he reviewed

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Somerville's conduct and manner, there was nothing to lead his thoughts into a more suspicious or unpleasant channel.

The clouds had begun to obscure the moon, and the weather was evidently working for a change. One of the sudden changes which might within a few hours obscure the harbour below them, moonlit and serene only a few minutes before, with blinding torrents of rain.

"I shall turn in," said McKenzie at length. "It's a bit chill now the wind has backed. Won't you?"

The two men rose from their chairs, McKenzie drew along the *amado*, and then with a "Good-night, old fellow; I hope no more *bake-mono* will disturb our peace," vanished into the house.

Somerville was just about to enter his room and close the *shoji* when there came a faint scratching on the paper panel.

He listened for a moment, and then, as it was repeated, he slid one of the *shoji* along in its groove and peered out into the semi-obscurity of the verandah.

At first he could see nothing, but at length he made out the figure of San-to beckoning him with her finger, and whispering, "*Oide nasai. Gomen nasai.*"

For the moment he could not think what the old woman wanted of him, but it was evident that she wished to speak with him, and that not near the room where McKenzie and Katakuri San slept, which was next his own. So he crept out with

bare feet on to the verandah, and followed San-to to the far end.

When he was close to her he could just see in the dim light that she held a piece of paper or a long Japanese rice-paper envelope in her hand. This she thrust into his, saying in a low tone, "Katakuri San bad woman is. Sent away Mio-San."

For a moment Somerville scarcely realised her meaning, and he exclaimed louder than he intended, "What do you mean, San-to? What is this you tell me?"

But San-to, with a gesture of alarm meant to enjoin silence upon him, merely whispered, "Honourable Englishman, read *chit*," and then glided away to her own apartments.

In Somerville's hand was a thin, long-shaped Japanese envelope of shrimp-coloured rice paper. In the gloom of the verandah he could scarcely see whether it was written upon, but when he had re-entered his room and looked at it by the light he found that it was evidently addressed to him. The blurred characters were certainly like those McKenzie had once shown him as constituting his own name.

What could it all mean? Mio-San driven away by Katakuri San as San-to had said, and this mysterious letter placed in his hands.

For some time he sat on the floor underneath the kerosene lamp which he had installed in place of the inefficient one provided by Katakuri San, consisting of a small red glass cup with a wick

floating in oil as illuminant, gazing at the envelope with the strange and straggling characters upon it. He could not read them, and so at last he decided to lock the envelope up in his desk and turn in.

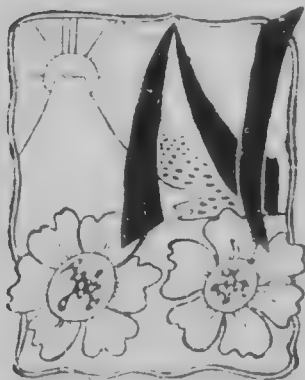
It was a long time ere he fell asleep, for the mystery of the note and San-to's statement regarding Mio-San kept him awake. This, then, was the explanation of the latter's absence at the meal a couple of hours ago, and the reason that Katakuri San had fetched her own pipe and the *tabako-bon* when they wished to smoke, instead of clapping her hands for her little maid as she usually did.

At length, however, he fell asleep beneath his mosquito curtains and dreamed of Mio-San, and of Katakuri San who was changed into the dreadful Fox-woman of whom McKenzie had been telling him stories—the woman who lures men to evil, and destruction.



CHAPTER VIII

SOMERVILLE RECEIVES A LETTER AND YUMOTO GIVES GOOD ADVICE



EXT morning when Somerville was awakened it was not by the noise of the cicadae nor by the song of thrush or bullfinch, but by the torrential rain rattling on the roof and impinging against the sides of the house

Outside a blinding deluge was sweeping across and obscuring the green hills and descending in thick sheets upon the town below, blotting out the view of the harbour and lashing its usually calm surface into white-capped waves. Dark grey clouds came rushing across the sky in vast and never-ending battalions, driven by a strong south-easterly wind. Through the watery veil which hung between the house and the town and mountain slopes, every now

and again Somerville could catch a glimpse of what lay below, when the strong wind seemed to tear the sheets of rain aside for a moment. At the back of the house the gale sang a dirge amongst the pines, and roared with great organ-notes in the gullies and chasms which ran down from the summits of the ridges to the harbour. Outside the drenched garden quivered in it; and the willow near the little bridge, that spanned an equally tiny stream now swollen to the size of a miniature torrent, bent over yet more sorrowfully than usual.

The garden of sunshine and flowers had suddenly become one of sadness and destruction.

Somerville was gazing out blankly upon the deluge when he heard Katakuri San's voice talking rapidly in Japanese, and McKenzie's deeper tones as though in anger.

In his pocket lay the note which San-to had so mysteriously thrust into his hand the night before. Whilst dressing he had been turning over in his mind what he should do regarding it. To ask McKenzie to translate it to him was out of the question. Somerville laughed rather grimly to himself at the very thought. One does not usually request a stranger to discover the contents of a missive of which we actually know nothing. McKenzie might stumble upon information regarding Katakuri San of an unpleasant character. No, that would not do, thought Somerville. The only alternative which suggested itself to his perplexed mind was Yumoto, and he fancied the latter could be trusted.

Katakuri San did not put in an appearance at breakfast. McKenzie excused her by saying that the fright of the night before had left her with a headache. Somerville said nothing. He was wondering whether little Mio-San, of whom he would now possibly not be able to complete a picture he had commenced, had yet gone away, and if so what she could be doing in the tempest of wind and rain which shook the frail house as though it sought to destroy it.

San-to brought in the meal, and noticing Somerville's look of astonishment, as Mio-San always waited upon them, McKenzie explained.

"Mio-San has gone away," he said; "Katakuri appears to have taken a dislike to her of late, and complains that she was insulting." Poor little Mio-San! thought Somerville. It was impossible to conceive the ever gentle and bright little creature insulting. "I am sorry," added McKenzie a trifle ruefully, "as it is a dreadful disgrace for her, and it will not be easy to replace her with another maid."

Whilst McKenzie was speaking Somerville caught San-to's eye, and he noticed when mention was made of Mio-San's outrageous rudeness to her mistress, a grim sort of smile flitted across her wrinkled countenance.

No more, however, was said, and the conversation drifted into a discussion of the weather and the probability of the continuance of the rain.

Once or twice Somerville was on the point of

dropping some observation which would have betrayed the fact that Mio-San, ere her departure, had written to him. But he managed to pause in time. McKenzie said little about Katakuri San's fright and indisposition of the previous night. In fact, he only mentioned it as he was putting on his oilskin coat and sou'-wester preparatory to departing for the town. Then he remarked, "I suppose you'll not turn out a day like this? Katakuri has been worrying herself lest this upset should prevent her sitting to you so that you can finish off that study of the little iris pond in the garden."

"I think I shall come down into the town later on," replied Somerville. "That's if the weather clears up a bit."

"Oh!" exclaimed McKenzie, "what's going to make you turn out in weather not fit for a dog? But," he added with a laugh, "I ought to apologise for cross-examining you in this way, old fellow."

"No need," said Somerville pleasantly. "I am rather expecting some letters addressed to Yumoto's office. You see, I've not yet been able to let all my friends know that I have been sponging on you for the last ten weeks."

"Of course!" rejoined McKenzie, stepping out into the driving rain, "*Sayonara!* If you find yourself near the Works, look in, and we'll have tiffin at Sei-yo-tei."

"I will," replied Somerville, as McKenzie turned away and walked briskly down the miniature brook which formed the path.

When he disappeared Somerville retired to his room to consider the situation.

So many women had flattered and cajoled him during his life in Paris, that Katakuri San's unblushing attempts to lay siege to his heart had at first only caused him amusement. He, however, now recognised that the trend of affairs was becoming serious. Mio-San, who he now began to regard with increased interest and sympathy, had disappeared. Whence he knew not. But the cause of her departure was plain enough. Katakuri San would brook no rival beneath the same roof. And he remembered that he had been good and kind to little Mio-San in his Bohemian, happy-go-lucky way.

Then he recollected what Yumoto had once told him concerning Katakuri San's vagrant affections, and he wondered vaguely what had prevailed upon McKenzie to instal her as the head of his household. Then he also called to mind that in the past there had been a saying current amongst the little circle of English and American artists in which he and McKenzie moved that "it is always the unexpected that happens to McKenzie." Then yet another thing came into view. Did McKenzie suspect Katakuri San? and if so, what did he think? It was not an easy matter to decide this question, for McKenzie was not either a talkative or a demonstrative man, and Somerville had learned that Katakuri San was clever enough to throw dust in any man's eyes who had the least faith in her left him.

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As he sat thus thinking in his studio, he heard Katakuri San calling to San-to, "*Oide nasai! Oide nasai!*"

And then came the maid's "*Hei! Doshu?*" in deeper tones above the rattle of the rain, as San-to hurried along the verandah to Katakuri San's room.

There was a sound of rapid conversation, questionings, and replies. Then Somerville caught the mention of his own name, then that of Mio-San.

On few occasions during his stay in Japan did he wish more devoutly that he had possessed a sufficient knowledge of colloquial Japanese to follow what the two women were saying to one another in tones loud enough to be heard distinctly through the frail paper *karakami* which divided the rooms.

That Karakuri San was angry, and San-to less humble in demeanour than was her wont he easily gathered. But that was all.

Outside the rain was now falling less heavily, and McKenzie's prognostication that noon would see the deluge stayed appeared likely to prove correct. Already the clouds were veeping less thickly across the hills, and the summits of many of the lower ones were becoming gradually visible as the vapour rolled back from them. Here and there shafts of brilliant sunlight pierced the clouds and fell down momentarily into the rain-washed town and harbour, making the wet roofs on which they fell shine like heliographs signalling to the heights above them.

Somerville rose and went out on the verandah to

watch the scene. In his pocket lay Mio-San's letter concerning the purport of which he felt so keen and increasing a curiosity. The heavy drops of rain, which in the early morning had torn the surface of the little goldfish pond like buck-shot, now only fretted it with tiny circles like those made by water-beetles. Down in the harbour lay two steamers brilliantly white as though cut out of ivory as a wandering ray of sunshine struck them; and now that the sea had gone down the black, beetle-like *sampans* were flitting between them and other vessels at anchor and the shore. In an hour the waters of the harbour had changed from the colour of green-grey agate, flecked with white foam, to that of jade. So intent was Somerville watching the atmospheric changes going on around and below him, that he did not hear the soft shoo-shoo of approaching footsteps, or realise another presence till Katakuri San had laid a hand lightly upon his shoulder.

"You are idle to-day, honourable Mister Artist," she exclaimed; adding after a pause, "I hope I have not kept you waiting. See, I have not stayed to put on my *kimono*, so that I would come to you as soon as possible."

Somerville had turned round and stood regarding Katakuri San attentively. There was no use denying it she was wonderfully pretty, and the half-sleepy droop of the eyes, which looked at him with such frank, undisguised admiration under their long, fringed lashes, was singularly attractive. All

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the tragic terror of the night before had passed out of her face, and in its place were the smiles which had brought Katakuri San much reputation for fickleness in her affections when she was a *geisha* at Fuji-tem. He suddenly remembered the saying of an artist famous in the Quartier Latin for his *bons mots* and paintings of fair women: "A pretty woman is never more attractive or dangerous than when she has just awakened from slumber—that is, to the awakener." And as he met her eyes he knew the truth of it.

Seeing that he did not move Katakuri San said, "I am ready. It is wet, and you cannot descend into the town to get your august person wet. Let us go and finish the picture."

"Where is Mio-San?" said Somerville, without answering her.

"Mio-San!" exclaimed Katakuri San, as though no such person existed. "She has gone away, honourable friend! I no longer had need of her, and one does not retain the services of those of whom one has no longer need."

Katakuri San glanced at Somerville with such an ingenuous smile that, had he been blind to certain events of the past few weeks, he might have believed that Mio-San had disappeared in the natural course of things.

"Where has she gone?" he demanded.

Katakuri San shrugged her shoulders as she had seen Madame Dubois and the officers of a French battleship do, and answered nothing, merely content-

ing herself with advancing towards the studio, and inviting Somerville to come with her and complete her picture.

"No, I shall not paint to-day," exclaimed Somerville. And then, seeing her look of inquiring astonishment, he added, "I have business with Mr. Yumoto."

Katakuri San paused and regarded him narrowly, and then glanced out at the weather. The excuse she had been about to urge to detain him was denied her, for the rain had nearly ceased, and through huge rifts in the skurrying clouds the sky was blue and clear.

"But——" said she. And then something in Somerville's pose and look told her she would waste her time in seeking to dissuade him, and so she did not complete the sentence.

"*Sayonara!*" she called out, as she shuffled along the matting with a little short-stepped run, whilst in her heart was anger and a sense of defeat.

When she had gone Somerville laughed to himself, half-contemptuously. How frank she had been when she once told him, "One does not share the best fruits with another." "Poor little Mio-San!" he mused, "and so she thought you were trying to pick fruit in her orchard."

Ten minutes later and Katakuri San saw Somerville in raincoat and oilskin cap disappear down the garden path, and then she gave way to the rage which burned in her fickle little heart, in which already so

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many similar passions had burned themselves to ashes.

Somerville made his way down into the town along the rain-torn road, that a couple of hours before had been little better than a torrent, and then along several of the narrow streets which intersect the main ones of Nagasaki commerce, paved merely in the centre, with overhanging roofs from which miniature Niagaras fell, and thence out on to the Bund. Now that the rain had almost ceased swarms of women were at work getting coal into the lighters, and clerks, many of them in strange mixtures of Japanese-European attire, were hurrying in and out of the various offices and warehouses, or standing checking bales and boxes on the *hatoba*. But Somerville was too anxious to get to Yumoto's office to loiter as he usually did, and watch what was going on.

A quaintly wizened clerk, who bore the euphonious name of Sugawara, wished him, in a strange mixture of English and Japanese, "*Kon nichi wa. Oagari nasai,*" and then informed him that the honourable Mister Yumoto was within and busy, but would see his august presence immediately.

In response to an invitation Somerville climbed the rickety staircase, which seemed less dependable every time he did so, and knocked at the little door of Yumoto's room.

"*Oagari nasai,*" called Yumoto from within, and Somerville pushed open the door.

After the usual elaborate civilities which Yumoto

always practised, reinforced with what he remembered of European courtesies, he inquired why his miserable office was honoured by the august condescension of his honourable friend, and assured his visitor that he had the whole of the day to give to his business should it require such an amount of time.

"I have come to seek your advice," said Somerville, seating himself. "Mio-San has disappeared. In a word, Katakuri San has discharged her."

Yumoto gave a low whistle—a habit he had acquired abroad, which, when he returned to Nagasaki, he had found conferred a certain air of distinction and uniqueness upon him, so he had cherished the trick for use on suitable occasions.

"So she has gone," he said, after a pause. "It does not bring me surprise. Where there is but one apple there is no need for two to pick it," with which somewhat cryptic utterance he smiled benignly at Somerville.

The latter found a shade more colour come into his bronzed cheek, and so he hurriedly dived into his undercoat pocket and produced Mio-San's letter. "This," said he, ignoring what Yumoto had said, "was given me last night by San-to. I can't read it, so I've come to you."

"From whom?" queried Yumoto, glancing at the envelope.

"Mio-San."

Yumoto whistled again.

He had seen Katakuri San look at Somerville, and her glance conveyed a good deal of meaning to his Oriental mind, cognisant as he was of the *ex-geisha's* past. Moreover, he had no great liking for Madame McKenzie and no little contempt for her, and he scented what might prove to be interesting complications.

"Mio-San," he repeated slowly, putting out his hand across his desk for the letter. "And why, my honourable friend, are you anxious to know what this contemptible girl has to say to you?"

"I am curious to know," replied Somerville, "because it is on account of my friendship with her that she has suffered disgrace at Katakuri San's hands. I must find her. For, Yumoto, I do not think Nagasaki the best place in the world for a friendless girl, especially if she is pretty."

Yumoto laughed a queer little laugh. "Pretty girls can always find friends. They would take her at Fuji-tei, at Fuku-ya, at Fuji-ya, at Hanazone, at the Garden of the Cherry Trees—anywhere, my honourable friend. But," spreading out the sheet of paper on his desk, "let us see what she says."

Mio-San had learnt to write at the missionary's house and in the village school, but what with haste and what looked like blots, where scalding tears might have fallen, her characters on this occasion were not so clear that Yumoto could read all of them at first glance. At length he commenced to translate. The letter bore no name and no address.

"To write to you is very bold, and may be evil," read Yumoto's calm voice, "but ever since my unworthy sight fell upon you I have been thinking of you and you alone. Each hour I have felt my humble self swallowed up more and more by the ever-growing thought of you like a stone sinks down into the bosom of a pool of still water. And when I sleep it is only to dream of you, and when I wake I look for your coming, and until I see you, O most august one, my heart is heavy and my eyes would weep. Forgive me that I should permit my unworthy heart and mind to thus dwell upon the radiance of one so high above me, and for expressing my desire that I might not be found hateful and unworthy in the eyes of one so noble. I pray you will esteem me not altogether unworthy of your august pity, and that you will even feel compassion towards me, and judge my heart's overflowing tenderness with not anger but kind feeling. It is only in the great distress of my mind and the tearfulness of mine eyes which may not again behold you that I venture to so unworthily address to you these words.

"May you live a thousand years, fortunate and happy. To the longed-for and worshipped august one this letter is sent."

When Yumoto had finished reading the letter he laid the sheet of thin rice-paper on which it was written down on the desk in front of him and whistled.

With his Oriental contempt for women, Mio-San's

tender little love-letter—which it must have taken her an infinitude of thought to compose—conveyed only two hard, cold facts. One that she was evidently in love with Somerville; the other that her conduct had been very irregular and reprehensible. For a moment or two he said nothing, and the only sound which broke the silence of the room was the patter of rain on the roof above them, and the droning voice of Sugawara, the clerk, reading over bills of lading in the room below.

At length he said, "Mio-San is yours for the asking. She is a pretty girl, and loves you. You need not now trouble your august thoughts by a consideration of O Matsu San, or O Ine San, if you wish for a wife."

Somerville's face flushed, and he was about to reply. But what was the use of doing so? He had already learned that Yumoto's views of marriage, temporary or permanent, were as far apart as the poles from his own, even though these were tinged with the Bohemianism of the Quartier Latin. Whilst Yumoto had been reading Mio-San's letter to him he had realised that she loved him, and in consequence had a claim upon him of a nature that it was not necessary to possess the keenest moral sense to admit. How to find her and protect her until her friends could be discovered was his chief thought. And yet at the back of his mind there was a nascent germ of artistic love of her which might develop along awkward lines. There was an

element of "drift"—which is seldom absent from the temperament of artists—in his nature which, tempered with honour, might land him in complications at any moment. Hitherto it had not landed him in matrimony, and sometimes he had vaguely wondered why.

"Well, my honourable friend?" exclaimed Yumoto with a smile, as Somerville made no reply to his former remark.

Somerville glanced at him quickly, and made up his mind that whatever faults his *vis-à-vis* might possess, he was to be trusted. In fact, he knew that Yumoto, outside business competition, was straight enough; that, indeed, he rather prided himself upon his Western sense of honour, acquired whilst a student at London University, and afterwards at the Sorbonne.

"Yumoto," he said, as the former lit a cigarette and thrust the box across the table to him, "never mind about Mio-San's confession of love for me. The thing to do, my friend, is to find her. She is a mere child——"

Yumoto laughed, and said slowly, "You make a mistake, awfully thinking one. She is no child, but a woman. None but a woman's love-swayed heart could have written that letter. Girls do not often thus write even to their lovers in our land. Besides, have I not watched her regarding you with eyes in which loving worship shone when she has handed you *sake*, or brought for your use the *tabako-bon*."

"Let that be as it may, the question which most concerns my mind is, Where can she be?" replied Somerville.

"Who can tell?" said Yumoto, with a shrug of his shoulders. "There are many *chaya* and other places where a pretty girl might have strayed to in Nagasaki. She may even, ere this, have made the acquaintance of Enoki, who finds wives for the officers of the war ships—who knows?"

Somerville felt his anger boiling over at the indifference the speaker showed. But in time he remembered that it was Yumoto who could help him to discover Mio-San. So he said, "It is my fault, O Yumoto, that Mio-San is no longer a dweller at the house of our honourable friend McKenzie, and I must find her. Will you assist me with your great wisdom and knowledge of the town?"

Yumoto paused and glanced at a pile of invoices and letters which lay upon his desk, kept down by a frog in bronze fixed to a slab of green marble. Somerville saw of what he was thinking. To Yumoto these invoices and bills of lading were of much greater interest than a search for the discharged servant of Katakuri San.

At last he spoke.

"Do you," asked he, "think we shall find her easily, O you impetuous Englishman? It may take hours, and I am very busy with the shipment of tea. But to-night I will come with you (it will be amusing), and we will search the places that I

should go to were I seeking some one like Mio-San. Will that please your august ideas?"

To Somerville such delay seemed intolerable, but he was in Yumoto's hands. Folkard was perhaps the only other person to whom he could have gone, and Folkard was not his own master, but a clerk in one of the Banking Agencies and unable to get off till late in the day, and, moreover, he did not possess half the astuteness or knowledge of Yumoto.

Whilst the latter was waiting for Somerville's reply he fingered the bronze frog and let his eyes rest upon that portion of the top letter which the marble slab failed to cover. It was a broad, if delicately conveyed, hint, and Somerville took it.

"It will have to do," said he. "Many thanks for being graciously disposed to help me. I will be here at dusk. *Sayonara*, for the present."

Yumoto slipped Mio-San's letter into its long, frail envelope and handed it to Somerville, who thrust it in his pocket. Then he shook hands English fashion instead of shaking his own as he used to do ere he went to Europe, and set to work on his papers almost before the narrow door closed behind his visitor.



CHAPTER IX

THE SEARCH FOR MIO-SAN—AT THE *CHAYA* OF
 "THE WELCOMING GEISHA"—HONJO DRIVES A
 BARGAIN



HEN Somerville stepped out of Yumoto's office on to the *hatoba* he found the rain had almost ceased. Venus Hill and the adjoining range had put off their caps of mist and cloud, and the sun poured down as though in haste to dry up every shining pool which lay in the worn stone flags of the quays and ill-paved streets. Away out in the harbour lay one of the mailboats coaling, a swarm of coolies climbing her sides like ants, and on the *hatoba* were scores of women, their bodies grimed with coal-dust, pouring their black burdens, carried in straw baskets, into the lighters alongside.

But to these Somerville paid no attention. The one thought which had possessed his mind since Yumoto had read Mio-San's piteous letter had been how should he set about finding her.

There was, indeed, little likelihood that she would be wandering in the streets, but he turned away from the waterside and threaded some of the narrow by-ways in the hope of catching a glimpse of her.

Overhead the roofs of the houses and shops almost met at times, and had he not been too much occupied with his quest he would have stayed to examine the quaint wares spread out in the dim recesses of the latter, but he pressed on, throwing an eager, searching glance down every alley and intersecting street or by-way.

Once, after passing along several of the wider roads, and just before he reached the bridge over the Nakajima-gawa with its low rail and huge stone lantern, weather-worn and chipped, standing like a sentinel between two trees, he fancied that a figure he saw ahead of him walking rapidly in clogs was that of Mio-San. But when he caught her up she proved to be a *musumé* who had been shopping and was on her way back to the outskirts of the town with her purchases.

She gazed at him with frank, childlike eyes, which took a shade of apprehension as their owner noted Somerville's look of blank disappointment.

"*Kon nichi wa,*" she said in a low voice, glancing at him with a conciliatory smile.

"*Kon nichi wa,*" replied he, adding as he turned

away the polite "*Gomen nasai*" ("I beg your pardon").

"It granted to you, august honourableness," came the reply, and then the little *musumé* clattered away across the bridge with the folds of her *kimono* gathered close around her and her wooden sandals making a musical *kuro-kuro* as she walked.

More disappointed than he cared to admit, Somerville leaned against the weather-worn lantern and looked along the river-bed, now turbulent with the rain from the heights at the back of the town. He pulled out his watch. It was long past the time when McKenzie would be expecting him to call in for tiffin at Sei-yo-tei. Even if it had not been so he would have avoided a meeting, with the possibilities of intimate conversation, with him as long as might be. It was not unlikely that McKenzie would regard his quest for Mio-San as Quixotic or even foolish.

There was a little restaurant near the Naka jimagawa, and he turned into it after he had watched the little *musumé* he had mistaken for Mio-San pass out of sight along the road.

At another time he would have laughed at the tiffin which the obliging proprietor of the "Tea House beside the Singing Water" hastened to serve him. Tea in a tiny pot accompanied by a little handle-less cup, *ame-mochi* (rice-cakes), *shiru* soup, slices of raw *tai*, slices of *kyuri* (cucumber), and *daikon* (large radish). But there was more than enough to satisfy him, for he scarcely ate

anything, and caused his host and the attendant *musumé* great distress of mind thereby.

After he had drunk a final cup of *sake* he made his way alongside the Naka jima-gawa towards the harbour, and crossed by the bridge, which led him afresh into the less frequented and narrower streets. He walked about with eyes keenly searching for Mio-San until the sun was sinking red into the sea and the shadows of the hills had fallen into the town. And then he suddenly remembered that he was weary, and that if he did not return to McKenzie's both his friend and Katakuri San would be wondering, perhaps anxiously, where he was and what had become of him. There might yet be time to catch McKenzie ere he left the Works, so he hailed a passing *jinrikisha*, and, with a strong-armed, sturdy-legged *kurumaya* between the bamboo shafts, was soon at the door which led into the portion of the Works where McKenzie had his office.

He had been gone half an hour. So said the American bookkeeper. What was to be done? Somerville asked himself. At last a bright idea suggested itself, and he asked if he might write a few lines to McKenzie.

The bookkeeper supplied him with writing materials, and he sat down to a desk gritty with dust from the pottery and stained with ink and wet glasses. In a few moments he had written all that was needed; simply a statement that he had spent the day exploring the town, and was going to

a place of amusement with Yumoto. McKenzie was not to bother about him nor wait up. He would perhaps be late home. Then the bookkeeper called a passing coolie for him, and the man sped away up the narrow street which debouched into the road leading to McKenzie's house a little way up the hillside. With a few words of thanks and a nod Somerville made his way out along the Bund.

Yumoto was waiting for him in his office.

"You have not found the girl?" the former asked, as a mere formality.

Somerville shook his head, and then Yumoto noticed as the light from the shimmering water fell upon his face through the window that he was looking tired and worn.

"You must have some whisky *sake*," he exclaimed concernedly, going to the little cupboard and taking out the precious bottle. "I can see you have idly tired your august legs and body searching for an altogether contemptible girl."

Somerville said nothing, drinking the whisky which Yumoto, regardless of its preciousness, had lavishly poured out.

When he had finished Yumoto sat down opposite him, and said, with a serious face, "My honourable friend, is it still the desire of your wonderfully kind mind to seek out Mio-San? There are other *musumé* who can be found with less difficulty."

Somerville fingered his glass and gazed at the speaker as though to fathom the depths of his Oriental mind, which apparently knew no difference

in women other than could be covered by the broad classification of good and bad.

Outside the light was fading rapidly, and the riding-lights of junks and steamers commenced to sparkle across the surface of the harbour. Somerville noticed this indication of oncoming dusk and became the more eager to be again afoot.

"My friend," said he at last, in reply to Yumoto's question, "I must find Mio-San if I am to rest to-night, or to rest contented for many nights to come . . ."

"And then?" queried Yumoto, with an enigmatic smile.

"And then—well, we can consider that afterwards. Let us be going."

Yumoto got up, pulled off his ink-stained *haori* in which he always worked and hung it on its peg. Then he brushed his European-cut coat, and putting it on announced that he was ready.

He evidently regarded the affair from two points of view. The first that his friend Somerville was Quixotic to an incomprehensible degree—it would have been so much easier, he argued to himself, to have found a pretty *geisha* at one of the numerous *chaya* and restaurants to replace lost little Mio-San. The second, that after all the evening before them promised amusement, and possibly excitement, even though it might not result in the discovery of her whom they sought.

"Where shall we go?" asked Somerville, when Yumoto had closed the outer door.

The latter paused and gazed out across the darkling expanse of water. After a moment or two, during which he had been running over in his mind a list of the most probable places in which Mio-San might be sought, Yumoto said slowly—

"You are very eager, my friend, but my unworthy stomach is empty. It is time for *ban-meshi*. Let us go and refresh ourselves at Hanazono Restaurant. Then we can set out to seek for Mio-San with less discontented minds."

Somerville felt compelled to assent to this proposition. Till Yumoto had mentioned *ban-meshi* he had not been conscious that he needed any, but whatever his own inclination might be, he recognised that it was too much to ask his friend to forego his evening meal.

"Very well," he replied, "let us go to the Hanazono. Perhaps we may hear something of her there."

But Yumoto shook his head. Mio-San was unlikely to find casual employment at so frequented a place. She must be sought for where the proprietor would be eager to secure a pretty face without asking questions.

Nishiyama Go was crowded with people, for the streets had dried except the narrowest and most ill-paved, and the night was warm. Outside the restaurants and tea-houses swung innumerable lanterns, chiefly of yellow, white, and peach-coloured paper, on which their makers had limned bats, moths, and fishes, whilst almost every passer-by carried his or

her own lantern swaying upon a slender bamboo cane. The laughter of women and *musumé*, the low hum of voices, the half-whispered apologies as one or other of the pedestrians jostled against a fellow-citizen, and the shrill cry of the *rikisha* boys clearing the road as they came along, almost passed unheeded by Somerville, whose mind was occupied with thoughts of Mio-San. But as he and Yumoto passed along the crowded thoroughfare and approached the restaurant he scanned the faces of each *musumé* who bore the least resemblance to her in height or build narrowly.

But it was a fruitless scrutiny ; for none of the laughing, hurrying *musumé*, whose clogs kept up a ringing kuro-kuro on the stones of the street, and whose faces when the lantern-light fell upon them seemed so joyous and free from trouble of any sort, proved to be Mio-San.

Both men were well known at the Hanazono, for Yumoto generally had his *ban-meshi* there when not dining at a friend's house, and Somerville had been there several times with McKenzie for tiffin, and frequently with Katakuri San and he of an evening.

They were shown into a little room formed out of a larger one by the simple and effective expedient of sliding panels, by the boy who hastened away to send Yumoto his favourite little waitress, O Kiku San.

For a time neither of the men spoke. In the next room they could hear the laughter and con-

versation of a party of naval officers and *geisha*—a strange commingling of the Japanese and English tongues. Evidently, thought Somerville, the Hanazono was doing great business that evening, and they would have to wait. And how irksome that waiting would be!

Around them all the rooms appeared to have their occupants, and Somerville experienced that strange oppression which had assailed him on the first occasion he had been at this much-patronised resort, the feeling of disquietude at the murmuring voices which he could hear but whose owners he could not see.

After a few moments Yumoto rose, slid aside one of the *karakami*, on whose surface was depicted an elegantly disposed flight of swallows, and peered out. In the distance he caught sight of a *musumé*, tea-tray in hand, and he called out, clapping his hands the while, "*Ta-betai, hayaku!*"

"*Hai-i-i! Tadaima!*" called back Miss Snowflake, who vanished as she spoke into the room where the officers from the mailboat and the *geisha* were making merry.

To Somerville their merriment seemed sadly out of place, and not even the quaint and formal entrance of O Kiku San, whose coming Miss Snowflake had hastened, kneeling on the white matting floor and pressing her fair forehead upon the backs of her hands, served to divert him from his thoughts.

The meal that Yumoto ordered consisted of eight courses, for he had been too busy all day to get his

usual tiffin, and he ate slowly. For him the quest of Mio-San was merely a more or less interesting way of spending the evening, and he scarcely noticed, in his full enjoyment of the various dishes, that his companion was eating little and growing impatient.

At length, however, the meal was done, and Yumoto ready to accompany Somerville on his quest. O Kiku San could not understand why the two men did not remain as they usually did for a smoke and a little dancing.

"Were they displeased with her or with the food?" she inquired anxiously, slipping the ten-sen piece which Somerville gave her into the little pocket she had constructed for the purpose in the wide sleeve of her *kimono*. And when Yumoto assured her that they had enjoyed *ban-meshi*, and thought her looking more charming than ever, she laughed, pushed aside the *karakami*, and, placing their shoes, which they had discarded on entering the room, convenient to their feet, ran away down the passage to attend to other visitors. Only, as O Kiku San was a coquette and Somerville handsome, she paused at the end to blow a kiss to him in the manner a naval officer had after many lessons taught her to do.

Before leaving the restaurant Yumoto consulted Iwata, the manager, concerning the houses and resorts at which it was most likely that Mio-San might be found. He was not very encouraging.

"The places," he exclaimed, with a grim smile,

"where a pretty girl may obtain employment are as numerous as the sparrows in the rice-fields. But you might search the *chaya* of the 'Golden Lotus' and that of 'The Beckoning Kitten.' But if she has met with Enoki, the proprietor, your path will be a difficult one. He is a bad man."

Yumoto translated this opinion to Somerville as they turned out into the street and made their way along it towards one of the places where it was possible Mio-San might be found.

"You have undertaken a great task," said Yumoto; "you may be very much tired before it is finished. Would it not be better to go up the hill instead, and rest upon our honourable friend McKenzie's beautiful balcony?"

1. Somerville shook his head decidedly, and Yumoto, shrugging his shoulders and whistling, led on.

As they passed along to their destination, threading the narrow streets, they were scrutinised closely by the few other pedestrians they met in the by-ways. The peaks of the black roofs, in which deep indigo shadows hung, above them were silhouetted sharply against the star-spangled sky. Once or twice a *musumé* or woman called to them "*Kon ban wa,*" or some challenge, to which Yumoto threw back a contemptuous or polite reply, the speaker might be either old or young.

At a corner of the street a musician was standing, *samisen* in hand, singing to a little crowd which had collected in a high-pitched and rather unmusical

voice. When she caught sight of Yumoto and Somerville she made greater vocal efforts, rolling her eyes and swaying her head from side to side in the very best manner of the Japanese singer. Near her head swung a huge paper lantern belonging to the shop round the corner, and had it not been for this the little singer would have been almost invisible in the dim light of the street, dressed as she was in a slate-coloured *kimono* and dark crimson *obi*. The two men stopped a moment in the hope that one of the little crowd, which stood in a half-circle almost enclosing the musician, might prove to be her they sought. But it was a vain hope. And so, after a moment's pause to toss a couple of sen in the basket at the singer's feet, they went on.

The *chaya* of the "Golden Lotus" was crowded, for it was one of the favourite resorts of the Europeanised younger Japanese of the town. In the big room which lay at the back of it through the quaint rockwork garden—a room almost as large as a small hall—one would always see good dancing, and hear singing which, if singularly discordant to unaccustomed European ears, was provided by highly-trained girl-singers.

On the spotless matting floor were seated dozens of Japanese in native or semi-native attire, mostly smoking and regarding the posturing of a couple of *geisha* who had acquired fame all over the town, and whose services are sought after by every one who could afford them to entertain parties of guests.

There were several of Yamoto's acquaintances and friends present, who regarded him and Somerville with vague curiosity whilst still keeping an eye upon the doings of O Dede San and O Sugi San. Remains of the refreshments, half-emptied cups of *sake*, crumbs, and beans, littered the floor in front of late comers. So great was the number of the patrons of the "Golden Lotus" that the *musumé*, who stood peering with smiling and painted faces round the corners of screens and *karakami*, had been unable to perform their duties of clearing away.

From the cross-beams above swung numbers of lanterns of all colours, stirred into lazy motion by draughts of cool night air from the garden. They threw shadows of the singers on the floor, and on the faces and bodies of the onlookers— weird, fantastic shadows which gave an air of unreality to the scene.

Upon the floor mingled with the men were half a score of women spectators, mostly young; and Somerville and Yumoto scrutinised each of their faces in turn in the half-hope of discovering Mio-San. One girl of about sixteen, dressed in a *kimono* of a similar shade of plum colour to that in which Somerville had been accustomed to see Mio-San, caused his heart to beat more quickly for a minute or two, until the little *musumé* turned round to address an old man sitting behind her and he saw her face.

After they had been in the room some twenty minutes Yumoto said, "It is no good stopping here,

my friend, although O Sugi San's dancing is well worth looking at. She whom we seek is not here, and Togakushi I have spoken to, and he has not seen any one like Mio-San. Come, let us be going. Unless," and Yumoto spoke rather wearily, "you are content to leave things as they stand. Better so! No use, I feel sure, looking for her to-night. In a day or two we might hear something. I might even inquire of Enoki."

An angry flush, which passed unnoticed because the lantern which swung from the beam just above his head was a rosy peach colour, suffused Somerville's face, for he felt if Mio-San were abandoned until she was traced by means of the notorious Enoki she would no longer be the innocent, thoughtlessly charming little *musumé* he had delighted to paint and study. But keeping his temper was essential if Yumoto's aid was to be ensured, and so he only said, "I cannot yet abandon the search, my honourable friend, so long as I am aided by your august assistance and intelligent mind."

Yumoto smiled.

It was nice for this Englishman to speak thus of him; and, although one *musumé* was very much like another to him, perhaps Somerville had a special interest in Mio-San. If he had it was nothing to him, only he might as well put him under obligation by helping to discover her.

"Very well, augustness ever persevering," he replied. "We will draw a net over 'The Sandalwood Box,' 'The Gate of the Sky,' and 'The

Beckoning Kitten,' and if we do not catch our fish in either of these places, perhaps, as a last hope, we may as well look in at the door of 'The Welcoming Geisha.' "

Somerville had heard McKenzie tell queer stories of the latter resort, and he devoutly hoped that Mio-San might not have found her way there. So out again they went into the narrow streets of the native town lined on either side by low houses, through the now translucent and closed *shoji* of the majority of which gleamed either *rampu* (lamps) or the white paper night lanterns like the sun seen through a mist. They met few people till they struck across a main street towards the harbour, and made their way towards the "Beckoning Kitten," then they encountered some European sailors on their way back to their ships, and a few grotesquely attired Japanese in bowler hats with English coats worn over their other native garments. But although there were *musumé* about, none that they overtook proved to be Mio-San. Nor did they discover her or any trace of her in the three tea-houses Yumoto had proposed to explore first.

Somerville was very tired and disappointed when they turned away out of the last place, followed by the laughing invitations of the *habitués*, couched in in polite Japanese, "To remain and see the honourable sun rise."

A tramp of half a mile through narrow alleys, the roofs of the houses on either side of which nearly met overhead, making the streets almost as dark as

tunnels, and they reached the restaurant known by the euphonious title of "The Welcoming Geisha." It lay almost at the bottom of a narrow lane leading to the waterside.

Yumoto knocked at the door, and after a minute or two's delay the *amado* was slid back, and he and Somerville entered.

A short passage led to the largish room in which the *sake*-drinking, singing, and dancing, for which the house was noted, went on. Long ere the end of the passage was reached sounds of applause came to them. For several moments after the *karakami* had been slid back they were unable to clearly distinguish the occupants, for they had come out of the darkness of the street into a room brilliantly lit with lanterns and *rampu*, and one, moreover, that was thick with smoke.

On the floor along two sides of the room were rows of Europeans and dissipated-looking Japanese, with foolish, whitey-brown faces, and eyes brightened for the nonce by the fumes of the vile whisky *sake* with which old Honjo, the proprietor, sought to poison his patrons. Near each was placed the inevitable *tabako-bon* and a small cup for *sake*. Three *geishas* in scanty but gorgeous and tawdry garments, their faces carelessly painted, but with their jet-black hair beautifully done in the butterfly style, were posturing and grimacing at their patrons from behind hideous masks, which every now and then they placed close in front of their faces to illustrate the points of their song.

But it was not these that riveted Yumoto's and Somerville's attention as soon as their eyes became accustomed to the light.

There, dressed in a gaudy *kimono* of crimson silk, embroidered in gold thread with a pattern of willow sprays, with a yellow silk *obi*, and her countenance brilliantly painted like those of the *geisha* who were dancing, was little Mio-San with a sad face forced to smile. As she was handing a cup of *sake* to a youthful Japanese, whose dank, black hair hung like seaweed from beneath the rim of his bowler hat, she caught sight of Somerville.

A flush of mingled joy and shame flooded her cheeks, and the lacquer tray and the cups upon it fell out of her trembling fingers. Somerville would have sprung forward, but Yumoto laid a tight grip upon his arm.

"*Tomara!* Do not destroy everything, my over-hasty friend!" he whispered. "We have found her; but if you wish to take her with you preserve your calm."

Somerville paused. He recognised the advice as being good. Seeing him pause and draw back, a look of piteous disappointment came into Mio-San's face. Was he about to go away? or was it all a dream?

Before either Yumoto or Somerville could decide upon anything, old Honjo had appeared on the scene, summoned by the ringing crash of the lacquer tray on the floor, and the sound of the breaking of *sake* cups.

His keen, dark eyes swept round the room, and seeing what had happened and who the culprit was, he ran forward and struck Mio-San upon the shoulder.

There was a momentary confusion amongst the guests, and ere Somerville could interfere Honjo had driven Mio-San from the room.

"Now come, quick!" ejaculated Yumoto. And stepping between the seated men they followed Honjo through the panel which he had slid back on entering.

A moment later little Mio-San was clinging to Somerville's knees, and entreating him to no more remove his shining presence from her.

Yumoto was meanwhile seeking to appease the furious Honjo, and by threats and cajolery trying to discover how it was that Mio-San came to be in his house.

"She is one of my *geisha*," the old man asserted mendaciously.

"No," exclaimed Yumoto; "you have stolen her. And the Englishman is a great lord, who will see that you are punished if you refuse to at once release her and let her go."

Honjo gazed at Yumoto without speaking. Lately, only Yumoto did not know it, there had been trouble with the police, who, when they raided "The Welcoming Geisha," although saying to Honjo, "*Gomen nasai*," which being interpreted was "August pardon deign to give us," had made it perfectly clear that *Chon Kino* and other no less

reprehensible things must not be too frequently repeated. Honjo had told the raiding *samurai* not to mention it, that he was delighted to see them, but all the same he knew that their eyes for the immediate future would be upon him and the dances and doings of his *geisha*.

The little group of three men, with Mio-San still clasping Somerville round the knees and petitioning him to take her away, was almost dramatic in the half-gloom of Honjo's private apartment—the room in which he weekly cheated his unfortunate *geisha* when he made up his accounts. Now the old scoundrel knew he would have in the end to give way, for Yumoto spoke with an air of authority, and was known to have friends in official circles. It was a pity he thought sadly, for Mio-San was prettier than any girls he had just then, and he for some weeks past had noted that some of his best patrons, who consumed most whisky *sake*, had come to regard the most outrageous posturings and songs of his staff of *geisha* with increasingly languid interest. In a word, they wanted something new. And in Mio-San, decoyed to "The Welcoming Geisha" whilst she sat lonely and sobbing under the cherry-trees near one of the *chaya* in O-Suwa Park, he had found the novelty he sought. And now this Englishman, whose eyes looked at him fiercely even in the dim light of the room, was about to take his prize from him. It was execrable, but inevitable. The only thing to do was to make as good a bargain as possible. The necessity for this had presented

itself to his astute mind even whilst Yumoto was first speaking.

"August one," he commenced, addressing Yumoto and bowing his head as though possessed of a humble instead of a rapacious spirit, "your worshipful will and that of the augustly honourable English lord must be done. But," and his tone took an injured key, "I am losing this miserable girl who would have been profitable to my contemptible establishment. You would not desire that I suffer thus, august honourableness?"

He paused to see if he had made his meaning clear.

Yumoto translated the speech and glanced at Somerville. The latter nodded. It was not worth while having a row if a few dollars would satisfy the scoundrel, and Yumoto understood.

On Mio-San's face there was a look of piteous anxiety. How was it possible, she thought, that this august Englishman should care to ransom her unworthy person, when she would have served him without reward for the sheer joy of doing so and being near him.

Yumoto looked at Honjo contemptuously as he replied, "You should be glad to release the girl you have stolen if we promise not to let the chief of police know your villainy."

Honjo shook his head and recommenced his polite assertions of the loss he was about to sustain.

"Cut the matter short," exclaimed Somerville

impatiently, for there was a miniature tumult in the adjoining room, where the squeaky-voiced *geisha* were still singing and moving about with a deadened shoo-shooing of their feet upon the floor.

Yumoto's spirit of diplomacy and bargaining were rudely shocked, but he too began to think that there might be trouble if Honjo had by any secret signal sent to inform his friends who were proprietors of neighbouring drinking-places of his difficulty. So he said, continuing his speech, "But the august Englishman, who is my esteemed friend, is willing to give you something for the food the girl may have eaten ; here," taking out a handful of money and counting out some of it, "are five yen."

This was too much for Honjo, who had thought of insisting upon ten times as much at least.

"No, no, augustly deigning one," he almost screamed ; "give me at least fifty paltry yen, and the girl may go."

Yumoto merely shook his head. He knew it would facilitate matters to let Honjo put his own minimum price upon Mio-San's lost services.

Honjo's wrinkled, evil face glared at the girl. She had never seemed so pretty as now when he was about to lose her.

Mio-San clung the more closely to Somerville, for, young and innocent as she was, there was something like the glance of a wild beast robbed of its prey in Honjo's eyes which she understood, and it frightened her.

"Forty?" queried Honjo.

Another shake of the head from Yumoto, who pursed up his lips.

"Thirty-five?"

"Thirty?"

"Twenty-five?"

Still Yumoto shook his head.

Honjo was boiling over with the rage he dare not show. But at the moment there was the sound of tramping feet and voices which he recognised as those of *samurai*. A whistle from Yumoto or a call might summon them, and Honjo was in no humour for an interview with the police just then. He saw Yumoto glance at his companion and whisper something. There was no time to lose, and so with a raging heart he said, "Will the august one give twenty yen? It is not much for so pretty a *musumé*."

Somerville, who gathered what he said, exclaimed, "Give the dirty blackguard the money, and let us go."

Yumoto counted out five notes into Honjo's yellow, outstretched and greasy palm. When the last one was placed there the recipient closed his fingers over them with a snap like that of a trap, as though fearing that Yumoto might yet change his mind and reopen the bargaining. Then he appeared suddenly to realise that little Mio-San was wearing garments belonging to him.

"Get up!" he said roughly, sticking out one foot from beneath his greasy *kimono* as though to push

her. "Quickly! quickly! those are my beautiful clothes. Come and get out of them. Hurry, miserable girl."

"Tell him," said Somerville to Yumoto, looking Honjo the while straight in the eyes, "that Mio-San doesn't go with him. She changes here."

Yumoto did as he was bid, and Honjo, after protest, hurried away, and a moment or two later the *karakami* at the other side of the room slid back to admit a *musumé* scarcely more than half Mio-San's age bearing an armful of clothes.

Mio-San, trembling in every limb, got up on to her feet and commenced to untie the gaudy *obi*. In a couple of minutes, whilst the two men listened intently for any suspicious noises which might indicate that Honjo was planning mischief, she was dressed in her own *kimono*, had tied her own quiet-hued *obi*, and was ready, *geta* in hand, to go with them.

When they were once more in the street Yumoto whispered to Somerville to keep his eyes open as they walked rapidly along. In his right hand he clasped a revolver, which he had slipped into his pocket before leaving his office. The street was by this time absolutely silent and deserted, the only noise being that caused by the thud of the two men's boots on the muddy path or the ring of Mio-San's *geta* as, when walking between them, she trod on the imperfect pavement in the centre of the street. Hoshin's shop in Funadaiku-machi was a long way, but they walked rapidly. When at last they

reached it Yumoto knocked upon the door, and when he heard some one stirring within he called out, "*Gomen nasai!*" and a moment or two later the *amado* was shoved aside and Hoshin with blinking eyes peered out.

When he saw who it was he uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

In a few hurried words Yumoto explained the situation, and Hoshin expressed how delighted both he and his wife would be to oblige so good a customer and so august an Englishman as Somerville by giving shelter to any one in whom he was interested.

"Please deign my unworthy house to augustly enter," he exclaimed. And the two men, unwilling to attract the attention of either belated passers-by or of roving *samurai*, pushing Mio-San in front of them, went inside.

Ten minutes later they left the house, and walked to the corner of the street, where their ways diverged, Somerville's climbing upwards through narrow by-ways, and Yumoto's running almost parallel with the harbour to his quarters in the better part of the town.

When they shook hands Yumoto said, "You are lucky, my honourable friend, to have found her. But what are you going to do with your bird now that you have caged it?"

"I shall know in the morning," replied Somerville wearily. "Ten thousand thanks; good-night."

"Good-night," called Yumoto, as Somerville

turn the corner and vanished up the steeply sloping street.

When he reached home Somerville found the house in darkness and the *amado* drawn. Like a thief he slid the panels backwards in their grooves, but not silently enough to prevent a slight screeching of wood, polished by wear, meeting other wood.

The *shoji* of McKenzie's room was slid back and his head appeared. "So you've come back," he said sleepily, but with a tone of inquiry in his voice.

"Yes," replied Somerville. "But, old fellow, I'm tired out. I am awfully sorry I have disturbed you. Tell you all about it to-morrow. Good-night."

McKenzie was too sleepy himself to care for a *tête-à-tête* at two o'clock in the morning, so he contented himself with yawning out "Good-night." And then he closed the *shoji*.

Somerville, without taking off anything save his coat and boots, fell asleep under his *kaya* to dream of legions of Honjos pursuing him and little Mio-San, and vainly endeavouring to satisfactorily answer the problem raised by Yumoto's parting question.



CHAPTER X

KATAKURI SAN LOSES THE GAME



OWN in the dark little room in Hoshin's house in Funadaikumachi, which had been hastily formed for her use by the shifting of the *karakami*, Mio-San lay long awake, although so tired that her eyelids felt stiff with want of sleep and her limbs ached till she could almost have cried.

At first when she lay down upon the *futon* with her head firmly fixed in the notch of her wooden pillow she thought only of her experiences at "The Welcoming Geisha."

It was only then that she, in her innocence, first realised vaguely what her decoying to Honjo's establishment had foreboded. The coarse talk of the *geisha* as they painted her cheeks and lips, and

tricked her out in the tawdry, gorgeous garments that Honjo provided had happily at the time conveyed little or no meaning to the mind of Mio-San. But as she lay awake gazing at the faint light emitted by the white paper lantern, which only seemed to make the darkness visible, what she had heard and seen began to separate itself in her mind, and to a certain extent explain itself, and she shuddered like a child would have done at terror but half-understood.

Then from the confused tangle of the events of the last twelve hours, almost like a luminous figure might have appeared to her in the darkness of the little room in which she lay, the remembrance of Somerville's sudden arrival at "The Welcoming Geisha" took shape. What would she not do for so augustly high a being? What could she do to show her appreciation of his honourable condescension in seeking her out? And then she wondered if San-to had given him her letter, and how he had read it, and what he had thought in his all-knowing wisdom of her presumption. What would become of her on the morrow, strangely perhaps, scarcely troubled her at all. The honourable Englishman, who had never given her an unkind word, who had even deigned to paint her despicable face so that it looked beautiful on the wonderful block of paper which would tear off leaves, would surely know what to do with her.

The weary little body, which ached as though it had been beaten with bamboo rods, and the no

less tired mind at last fell asleep just as the early morning light, which had had to climb over many intervening and higher roofs than that of Hoshin's dwelling, began to filter like golden threads through a crack in the top groove of the woodwork above in which the *shoji* ran.

Somerville woke late, and when he was disturbed by the sounds of McKenzie moving about and whistling on the verandah he could not for the moment remember what had happened the previous day to cause him to feel as though some heavy responsibility or impending evil weighed upon him.

But soon he collected his thoughts, and from amongst them there stood out the tiny figure of Mio-San, who was still asleep down in the town below, dreaming of him as of some radiant being related to those who dwelt in the land inhabited by the beloved ghosts.

Back into his mind came Yumoto's last question of the night before as they stood ere parting at the corner of the street in the darkness, "But what are you going to do with your bird now you have caged her?"

He dressed hurriedly and went out on to the verandah.

McKenzie was evidently awaiting him, and hurried forward.

"I was hoping you would wake up, old chap," he said, "before I had to start for the Works. What in the name of goodness became of you all day

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yesterday? When you did not come home for dinner both Katakuri and I got quite fidgety, for she told me you had gone off in a hurry and without your painting traps."

"I went to find Mio-San," explained Somerville quite simply.

His companion whistled softly. And then he ejaculated the questioning monosyllable "And?"

"And Yumoto and I found her about midnight in a low singing-shop, 'The Welcoming Geisha.'"

McKenzie's face had a look of extreme astonishment. "What the devil took her there?"

"I scarcely know," replied Somerville, "but Yumoto gathered from what she told him that she had been decoyed by one of the *geisha* who were attached to the place. Anyway, after a good deal of bargaining, and some discreet hints of trouble if he didn't give her up, we frightened and cajoled that old beast Honjo to let us take her away."

"And?" again queried his listener.

"And she has spent the night at Hoshin's down in Funadaiku-machi."

McKenzie said nothing for a moment or two, and had the two men been less occupied with their thoughts they might have heard the *shoji* of a neighbouring room pushed gently aside and have seen Katakuri San's face peering through the aperture.

At last McKenzie spoke. "You are serious, old man?" he asked quietly.

And Somerville, understanding what he meant, replied somewhat lamely, "I shall not be the only European. . . ."

"Obviously," remarked McKenzie, remembering Katakuri San. "But you did not come out here to stay. What then?"

"I am willing to run the risk," was the reply.

"She's a nice little girl," said McKenzie meditatively, "and you'll improve your knowledge of Japanese pretty quickly, I reckon."

To him it seemed a perfectly natural solution of the situation, for he had not yet entirely forgotten the easily arranged marriages of the Quartier Latin. "I think Katakuri ought to hear the news, so I'll go and find her."

As he went along the verandah to their room Katakuri San stepped out of the one in which she listened, concealed, and, with a face from which she had driven all expression of astonishment, advanced to meet him.

"So our honourable friend has returned safely," she exclaimed. "And why did he leave us to wonder where he had gone till his *chit* arrived?"

"He had gone," said McKenzie, and Somerville thought that whilst he spoke he looked at Katakuri San rather curiously, as though to watch the effect of what he was about to say, "to seek for Mio-San."

Katakuri San started visibly, and for a moment her face paled. But she had a marvellous control over her features when the need arose, and she recovered her composure almost instantly.

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"So it is Mio-San," and she laughed contemptuously, "that our august friend has been seeking. It is on such despicable game that he expends his august skill in hunting. And when is he to set up housekeeping with her?"

Katakuri San was a really talented actress, but she could not quite banish a look of malignity from her face or a ring of chagrin from her voice.

Somerville caught the latter, and when he spoke he did so as coolly as though Mio-San were Katakuri San's greatest friend.

"August pardon deign," he said, "for my having caused you trouble by my absence last evening till so late. But you had told me Mio-San was from Ureshino, and therefore homeless when you drove her from you, for which," and he looked Katakuri San so straight in the face with what she always called his "honourable green eyes" (for all eyes were green to her which were not either black or brown) that her own dropped, "I felt I was to blame."

Katakuri San shrugged her shoulders, and merely said, "I had no use further for her contemptible services." And then she turned away.

Somerville realised that he had made an enemy, and congratulated himself that he had already spoken so definitely about finding either a house or apartments.

When Katakuri San had passed from sight within the house McKenzie asked Somerville if he had any definite plans. For that new plans would now be

necessary, with Mio-San bulking so largely in Somerville's estimation, he made no doubt.

"I shall try to get a house somewhere on the hillside over there" (and he pointed towards the entrance to the harbour), "and then I shall settle down to work."

"Are you going to get married before the Consul or down at the Prefecture?"

"Before the Consul. The formalities are not very formidable, are they?"

"Very simple," replied McKenzie, smiling. "If I can be of any use, however, my dear fellow, let me know. But I must be off down to the Works now. Ta-ta till tiffin."

"Good-bye," rejoined Somerville, and then, after he had seen McKenzie disappear, he turned, and walking along the verandah entered his studio.

As he was turning over his things preparatory to putting some of them together for packing up San-to entered with some breakfast for him. She was too humble and discreet a servant to ask questions of the honourable guest of her employers with her lips, but she did so with her eyes.

When Somerville told her that Mio-San was found, and at Hoshin's in Funadaiku-machi, her yellow and wrinkled face exhibited so wonderful a smile that her small eyes seemed almost to disappear. "*Kekko! Kekko!*" ("It is good, splendid!") was all she ventured to say. But there was something convincing in the way she pronounced the words.

Somerville saw little or nothing of Katakuri San during the morning. She, boiling over with rage and disappointment, preferred the seclusion of her own room. It seemed impossible to her that so contemptible a person as Mio-San had captured the heart of the handsome guest upon whom she had turned all the batteries of her arts of coquetry for six weeks past. And when she heard the sounds of Somerville moving about in the neighbouring room packing up his things she set her nails deep into her plump palms.

In a few days at most she would see him no more, or only so occasionally that her influence over him would be little or nothing. To her he was a mystery; for she knew that she was beautiful, and it seemed incredible that he would not stoop to pick up what most men she had previously met with had striven for. And quite apart from her chagrin was the fear of that to her deadly dullness which had characterised her existence since she had been mistress of the house on the hillside before Somerville came—a form of life so different from the gay and varied one she had led at the restaurant in Ima-machi.



CHAPTER XI

KATAKURI SAN MAKES A PRESENT—THE LITTLE HOUSE ON THE HILLSIDE



EXT morning Somerville found a vacant villa high up amid the woods on the hills above the foreign settlement, along towards the entrance of the harbour — a tiny, box-like place with a magnificent prospect of Nagasaki with its bewildering acres of gabled

roofs, its wide-spreading harbour dotted with tramp steamers, mailboats, and junks, and the long line of its busy *hatoba* looking at that distance like a fence for the purpose of keeping the houses from slipping into the water.

Hide-yoshi, the *compradore*, or agent, of whom Somerville took the house, assured him that he would obtain a marvellous bargain; whilst Yumoto asserted that twenty-five yen per month was a

preposterous sum to pay. As for Somerville, he was more than satisfied. There was a delightful garden, through which a trickling stream ran musically, lotus ponds and iris ponds, quaint rockeries, and equally strangely-shaped trees, whose stunted and crabbed growth gave them every appearance of the extreme age they were asserted to be. Some of them at dusk looked almost like malformed human beings, so weird in shape were they.

During his last day at McKenzie's house he saw little of Katakuri San, who, since learning that he was about to marry Mio-San before the Consul, had avoided him when possible. His packing had occupied nearly the whole of his time, and whilst he was engaged upon it he thought of Mio-San, and the wonderful expression of joy which had suffused her delicately pretty face when he and Yumoto together had made her understand that the "immense augustness" was going to marry her. Hoshin's amiable but somewhat avaricious wife was never tired of telling Mio-San how fortunate it was that she had found favour in the eyes of so generous and honourably handsome a foreigner, adding that when he left her—and at this suggestion Mio-San's eyes always filled, whilst her heart beat tumultuously—he would no doubt make her so handsome a gift that she would be able to live for a long time in comfort.

For Mio-San, whose little coquetties by which she had sought to woo Somerville's notice had been



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

ANSI #1 TEST CHART



1.0

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prompted not by womanly experience, as had the more shameful ones of her mistress, but by innocence, there seemed no practical future now without her very tall august husband. It was impossible for her to realise such an eventuality, even if she had not (as she always did) driven the thought of such a thing from her mind.

McKenzie, after two years' experience of Japan and Anglo-Japanese marriages, accepted Somerville's idea of marrying Mio-San with an easy philosophy.

"When one is marrying a pretty woman," he said, "it matters little whether she be a *musumé* or, as in my case, a *geisha*. Though probably one will tire of the former sooner than of the latter, because women who have learned the art of pleasing as a business often succeed where amateurs fail. We shall see how it turns out."

As for Somerville, he only laughed when his friend gave voice to his opinion, and said nothing.

Nothing could have been simpler than the arrangements for his marriage. No one save Mio-San had to be consulted, except the Consul, who fixed the day and hour. Once like a flash there came into Mio-San's mind the remembrance that when at home at Ureshino there had been an old man—at least so he seemed to her as a girl of sixteen—who had been the proprietor of the tea-house near the river, to whom her parents talked of marrying her. But then she had heard nothing from them all the many months she had lived with Katakuri San. This part of her life, however, was now behind her, and to her

mind only one idea presented itself clearly, that of living with Somerville, seeing him paint those wonderful pictures, listening to his voice, though of English she could only understand the simplest words and sentences.

The night before his marriage Somerville left McKenzie's and took possession of his own house. He had engaged a cook Hoshin had recommended as "a very good cook though not augustly beautiful." As a matter of fact, Shi-wono was quite ugly.

As Somerville was about to leave Katakuri San came out on to the verandah to say good-bye. She evinced little or no regret at his going save of the most conventional kind. But as she shook hands she pressed a small, oblong lacquer box, similar in shape to a *yatate* or pencil and ink case, upon him.

"I have been sorry in my heart," she said, but had he been looking at her face instead of the box he would have seen a sullen fire in the depths of her beautiful eyes, "that I drove Mio-San away. This is a contemptible gift from me to her. Give it her, but not until she is dwelling in your house."

Somerville took the little box, which was wrapped in straw-coloured rice-paper and securely tied with paper string, and, thanking Katakuri San with the most elaborate politeness for her gift, slipped it in his pocket. Then, after obtaining a promise from McKenzie to come and see him very soon, he picked up the last of his luggage and made his way down the path and out of the gate.

His road, in places a mere mountain foot track, lay away to the left of McKenzie's house past a row of villas which clung to the hillside set in quaint, green gardens overlooking the town. About three-quarters of a mile along this path, which at last turned upwards amid the trees and became wider where it ran into that leading over the hills to Mogi, Somerville came in sight of his home in the distance, perched up on the slope of the dark green hill like a match-box dwelling set amid the trees.

It was now almost dusk, and he hurried along, for the road was strange, and were he to lose his way it would be difficult for him to ask for directions. As he crossed a path leading downwards and back into the native town he began to wish that he had taken McKenzie's advice and remained with him until after the ceremony of the morrow at the Consulate.

There was something almost uncanny in his taking possession of his strange little house, which stood isolated from the nearest other villas amid the gloomy greenness of cryptomerias and pines, at night. How much more cheerful would it have been, he thought, as he strode rapidly along, had Mio-San been with him! And from thoughts of her his mind strayed to Tokio and Violet Desborough. What would she say to this marriage of his?—so unlike the conventional idea of European wedlock, so romantically inconsequent, so much a matter of sudden impulse.

But though he wondered thus he was perfectly content, for his ruling instinct was satisfied with the

quaintness and dainty charm of little Mio-San, who was sitting thinking of him and worshipping him in Hoshin's house somewhere down amid the dark mass of roofs which lay a mile or more away below him.

At length he reached the gate which led into the garden of his house. It was approached by a footpath of reddish-brown earth, which he realised would be a perfect quagmire in wet weather, but was now baked hard by the sun. Shi-wono, who had command of fluent if wonderfully incorrect English, through her having been a servant at one of the hotels, was waiting for him, for she had hurried out at the sound of his footsteps approaching the house along the path. As he climbed the steps leading up on to the verandah, Shi-wono prostrated herself with due humility, and murmured, "Welcome, most august master; please to make yourself at home." Then, having bumped her forehead against the backs of her outspread hands, she got up and inquired, "Will your augustness eat *ban-meshi* much?" which was her way of inquiring if Somerville would have dinner served.

"Yes," replied the latter, "and let it appear as soon as your honourable fingers can serve it."

The house was not a large one; indeed, quite the reverse, for it had but a large room which was to be turned into a studio, a living-room, and a bedroom along the front of it, all opening on the verandah, and a bedchamber with the addition of a kitchen at the back.

But on the evening Somerville came to it alone it seemed an immense one in its loneliness and the twilight. Except for the monotonous chirp of the cicada, the occasional call of a drowsy or disturbed bird, and the sounds of Shi-wono moving about whilst getting the meal in the kitchen, there was nothing to disturb the vast and impressive silence which surrounded it. No noises of the town, which lay down below to the right of the slope on which the house stood, reached it. Indeed, in the oncoming darkness there was nothing to remind one of the existence of the busy streets and thousands of human beings save the twinkling lights which were visible from one end of the verandah, where a vista had been cut through the intervening trees by a former occupant of the house.

In front of the house lay the principal half of the garden, with a tiny stream, which rose somewhere in the hills at the back and found its way through Somerville's domain to the sea below, running through the garden, and feeding the lily and iris ponds that nestled in one corner under the shadow of the pines, cryptomerias, *icho*, and other trees. On the other side of the garden were cherry, plum, and other ornamental trees, with the wonderful "dwarf" garden which had so much taken Somerville's fancy when he first inspected the house. At the back were the woods, running up almost to the rugged summits of the hills, covering the slopes as with a dark green mantle.

Already on the verandah Shi-wono had placed

some miniature pines and palms in pots, and in the studio and living-room were simple though emblematic floral decorations placed in the *toko-no-ma*, which, had Somerville but understood the intricate art of flower arrangement, he would have recognised as indicating a welcome to him and the coming mistress of the morrow.

After he had finished his dinner Somerville carried one of the three or four deck-chairs which, after a long search, he had obtained at a marvellously dear price from a *tobutsuya* in Tera-machi, on to the verandah and sat and smoked.

It seemed impossible that he was to be married on the morrow—that in some twelve or fifteen hours Mio-San would be installed as his native wife and the mistress of his house ; Mio-San, almost a child compared with him, yet the only woman who had inspired him with more than a passing interest or desire to retain her within the horizon of his own personality. Everything, save his beloved Art, was generally of an experimental character with Somerville. He had only escaped matrimony during his years in the Quartier because the experiment had lacked interest ere the possibility of its being made a reality occurred. All the girls and women he had known and admired—a goodly array they proved—ranged themselves upon the screen of his memory as he sat gazing at the twinkling lights of harbour and town spread out below him. But, unless he deceived himself, none was able to compare for sweetness, freshness, and charm with her who at

the same time was dreaming of him down at old Hoshin's. Suzanne, she was handsome and vulgar ; her laugh when anything amused her dominated other people's ; Elise, she was frail, neurotic, capricious, like a flower of exquisite beauty which can only flourish in a warm atmosphere ; Stephanie, dark as night, beautiful as a tiger cat, violent, fatiguing ; Christabel Johnson, a fair American girl student who had favoured him above competitors for her smiles, strenuous, a mass of nerves, never in repose, full of plans ; and lastly little Messaline, the interesting but terrible product of a vitiated bourgeois ancestry, flashing like a star in the firmament of the Quartier, disappearing like one of the ethereal worlds doomed in their luminosity to destruction.

Then, whilst he sat listening to Shi-wono's wonderful squeaks, which with her passed for singing, he again thought of Violet Desborough. And then he wondered if she were ever likely to re-enter his life. It scarcely seemed possible, and he marvelled that at the present time he was capable of but a transient interest in her. Mio-San, who might, for all he knew, prove merely a lovely, soulless little being, though capable of great devotion, was infinitely more desirable and attractive—a pretty, unexplored tract of womanliness, unlike anything he had yet discovered.

A woman never appeals to a man more strongly than when she is grateful and shows it, or when she is weak and needs succour. He remembered that this was the verdict that had been brought in one

summer's night after a heated discussion on the charm of women in his studio in Paris, Alitson, a fellow-student at Colorossi's, who had been jilted by his *amie*, remarking that when women's gratitude becomes yet more attenuated by reason of modern "emancipation," and her need of succour less by the same process, they would have to do all the proposing themselves, for few men would wish to marry them.

Then Somerville's thoughts trailed off to Hoshin's wife and Mio-San. And he wondered if they had managed to spend all the "honourably numerous yen" which he had given to the latter the day before for the purchase of wedding garments, and the odds and ends of things which go to the total of a Japanese girl's adornment. Mme. Hoshin's eyes had glittered like those of a beady-eyed doll at the sight of so much *satsu* (paper money), and Mio-San had lifted up her soft, brown eyes to his face with wonder lurking in them at the marvellous generosity of her august husband to be.

On the morrow there would be a short, unromantic ceremony at the Consulate; and then Mio-San would have become mistress of this house of his. Yumoto had frankly told him only that afternoon that he was a fool to trouble about the visit to the Consul, that it would be only adding difficulties to ultimately getting rid of Mio-San, when he should have tired of her; that the latter herself would have willingly dispensed with the ceremony. It had been in vain that Somerville

protested that he would not want to get rid of her, that Mio-San would prefer the visit to the Consul. Yuunoto only shrugged his shoulders and said, with a cynicism that was probably justified by experience, that Mio-San's parents would have sold her to so distinguished a husband willingly and without compunction. In his heart Somerville knew that to Mio-San the ceremony would have been deemed superfluous because of her love for him. In fact, it was more than possible that it would convey little or nothing definite to her mind, beyond the fact that she was to live with him and see him every day, with no mistress to interfere or scold her for so doing.

One by one the stars came out in the deep blue vault above, and the moon swam slowly upward over the further hills, and then into the firmament above the environing belt of cryptomerias, pines, and maples on the left of the garden, making the scene from the verandah one of exquisite and romantic beauty, whilst Somerville still sat musing and wondering what the future had in store. From his mind all other figures save that of little Mio-San had faded, leaving her to dominate his artistic and physical senses. And then he shuddered at the recollection of the scene in the reeking atmosphere of Honjo's drinking den, and the coarse shamelessness of the *geisha's* faces and posturings. It was good to have saved fragile, pretty Mio-San from such a career.

As he was thinking of her and the might-have-

been, Shi-wono came along the verandah and asked if she should not close the *amado*

"The honourable moon is climbed up," said she, "and the *nezumi* (mice) are already out of their holes," which was merely her way of telling her master that it was time she went to bed. Somerville himself yawned at the mere thought of sleep, and so when Shi-wono had slid along the *amado* and disappeared into her own section of the house, he himself rose and retired to rest.

But for a long time the noises of the house kept him awake—the scampering of the mice along the rafters above his head and beneath the joists of the floor, the screech of an owl, the insistent whirr of the cicadæ, and those multitudinous crackings and creakings which seem to afflict Japanese dwellings when the sun is off them and the mystic hours of darkness have arrived.

At length he fell asleep, and by some strange freak of the sub-conscious mind his dreams were not of Mio-San, but of Violet Desborough far away in Tokio, who as yet knew nothing of this Japanese marriage of his, or of the little *musumé* who had captivated his sense of the beautiful and uniquely strange.

Next morning he was awakened neither by sunlight nor the song of the birds, but by the *gaku* (music) of Shi-wono's voice singing a welcome to her mistress to come. For a few minutes, in the half-gloom of his bedchamber, Somerville could not imagine what the weird screechings and meander-

ings up and down an unknown musical scale portended. But at last he detected an inflexion of Shi-wono's voice which was familiar and he lay listening, reassured. Then he realised that within a few hours he was to marry Mio-San, and that within a few more hours beyond that time she would be installed as the mistress of the house, as the arbiter of his domestic destinies and peace. Soon Shi-wono's voice was heard outside inquiring if he had enjoyed "honourable tranquillity," and when he would wish breakfast. And then began the rattling and sliding back of the outside shutters as she opened the house to the radiant, early morning sunshine.

After the meal, which proved to be the best substitute for a breakfast which he had had in Japan, for Shi-wono had learned to consult English tastes somewhat in such matters whilst servant at the hotel, Somerville gave orders that the house was to be ready to receive its mistress by sundown, and then he set off down the rather rugged path to the town.

In the woods the birds were yet singing, for it was quite early; and below the harbour gleamed like frosted silver under the slight mist which hung over its surface and invaded the portion of the town near its shores, the foreign settlement, and the buildings upon Deshima. But long before Somerville had reached the outlying part of the town nearest to the slopes of the hills on which his dwelling stood, the mist had lifted, and the distant

hills and harbour entrance which they environed became clear and distinct.

Into the narrow, steep, and still descending streets he at length plunged on his way to the Bund and Yumoto's office, anxious to make sure that his Japanese friend amid the pressure of the tea harvest had not forgotten that he was to assist at the ceremony which was to take place at the Consulate about noon. McKenzie he knew he could trust.

Yumoto was in, and when Somerville entered his office he greeted him almost with effusion, so anxious was he to make him understand that if he (Yumoto) thought him unnecessarily punctilious in this marriage of his, he was desirous of lending him every possible assistance in its consummation.

"You are really still serious, my honourable friend?" he questioned, after the exchange of the usual elaborate greetings. And when Somerville assured him that he was Yumoto laughed and smiled an enigmatical smile as though he thought that his English friend was adopting an unnecessarily complicated method of attaining a given end.

"And what does Madame McKenzie say?" he asked, after Somerville had told him the arrangements. "Is she not delighted that you and I should have discovered Mio-San?"

"She is sorry, I think," replied Somerville, "that I should leave their augustly hospitable roof. But doubtless she will, after all, be glad to be relieved from the trouble of entertaining me."

Yumoto shook his head. He knew that Katakuri San would have willingly become the mistress of his honourable friend's house, and he only marvelled that the latter should be (if he were) ignorant of the fact. But it was evident that Somerville was not anxious to discuss Katakuri San, and so Yumoto contented himself with saying, "Now, my friend, you are going to marry O Mio-San; it is well for her and for you that the custom of decorating a rival's august features with vitriol is not so prevalent here as in Paris, or it would be well for the honourable lady of your house to be to see little of her late mistress."

Somerville started slightly. For the first time the fact that there was bitter and possibly lasting enmity between the two women presented itself clearly before his mind. Whilst he had still been an inmate of McKenzie's house he had regarded the jealousy, which of course he was aware existed, as an incident which would certainly die a natural death by reason of the separation of the twain—the natural jealousy which is sure to exist where two women pursue the same object. But he dismissed Yumoto's disquieting suggestion from his mind. The day was too instinct with happiness and too radiant with sunshine for gloomy thoughts and forebodings.

"You estimate Katakuri San's regard for me too highly, my august friend," he replied, laughing. "Surely she could not have been jealous of her maid?"

Yumoto smiled knowingly, and said after a pause, "Not of her maid, but of a beautiful *musumé's* influence over you, my most excellent but not too far-seeing friend. Women are naturally the quarry, men the hunters; but when passion reverses that delightful order of things, the hunters have no pity to spare for others engaged in the chase. Take my word, let what I say sink deep into your most honestly simple mind; beware of the woman who has loved you when you love another woman. But much as I am enjoying your society, my contemptible business demands that I should attend to it if I am to arrive at the Consulate in time to witness the pleasing ceremony your honourable punctiliousness is to provide."

"Which means," exclaimed Somerville, rising and smiling, "that I am to go?"

"I regret the necessity, but the tea harvest leaves one no choice. Whilst you dreamed on your verandah of Mio-San and happiness last night, I was here drowned in figures, sick of tea and everything which provides my miserable body with the right to exist."

"You will not fail me?" said Somerville, with his hand on the door.

"May I be troubled for ten thousand years by the ghosts of my ancestors," rejoined Yumoto grandiloquently in reply. And then as the door closed behind Somerville he returned to his invoices and bills of lading with a sigh of relief. This marriage of his English friend was made of far too serious a

description, marriage, to Yumoto's Oriental mind, merely being a male tribute to women's charm and usefulness.

Somerville walked along the Bund, and turning up a by-street from the waterside he soon reached Funadaiku-machi and Hoshin's shop.

Hoshin, the lacquer-merchant, was sitting in the dim recesses of his well-known shop, thinking of the possible customers who might patronise him on the morrow when the great *jokisen* came in from Hong-kong ; but he at once caught sight of Somerville and called out a welcome. Then he summoned his wife Haru San, who, however suitable her name, "Honourable Spring," might once have been, was now decidedly in the autumn of life. Haru San's voice could be heard coming from the back of the house calling in a shrill tone, "*Hai-i-i !*" and a moment later she appeared.

Haru San could speak but a word or two of so-called English, but she realised whom it was Somerville required, so, after she had kneeled on the floor and bumped her forehead in salutation, she contented herself with pointing to the open *karakami* and ejaculating the words "*Mio-San, achira.*"

With a polite "*Arigato,*" Somerville stepped through the shop and the room behind it, and sliding back the *shoji* let in a flood of subdued radiance from the strange little garden which lay shut in by other houses. It was very small, but in it were all the elements which go—on a larger scale—to the making of a garden of size. The miniature

rivulets, tiny rocks, and dwarf trees, scarcely so large as one's knees, which possessed miniature branches like giant oaks and cedars, and had the appearance of full-sized trees, though so sadly dwarfed, all contributed to the strange feeling of unreality which such gardens bring about.

Sitting on one of the artificial rocks near a trickling stream, scarcely larger than those one sometimes sees in old-fashioned mechanical models contrived by a revolving spiral of glass, was Mio-San, patiently awaiting the arrival of her "august husband and very condescending honourableness to be."

At sight of Somerville she rose and hastened forward, and, regardless of the beautiful *kimono* she wore, which she and Hoshin's wife had purchased for a wedding garment, she was about to sink on to her knees in salute; but Somerville caught her, and said, smiling at her glowing face and sparkling eyes, "*Tomare! Dozo!*" ("Stop, if you please"). And then, more by signs than words, he made her understand that he did not wish her so to welcome him.

To Mio-San it appeared the most natural thing in the world, now that she had mastered the idea of Somerville's great condescension, that she was about to live with him and be the mistress of his house. To Somerville the approaching ceremony still seemed to smack of unreality and even impermanence.

Whilst he was endeavouring to question Mio-San as to the completeness of her preparations for

quitting the shelter of Hoshin's roof, and congratulating himself that she possessed at least an elementary knowledge of English, Hoshin's wife, Haru San, came out into the garden, and with a profusion of polite phrases told him in broken English and Japanese of all the wonderful things which his bundle of *satsu* had enabled them to purchase, omitting, be it said, any reference to the considerable commissions which she had made upon most of the purchases.

When Mio-San slipped away to add the last touches to her coiffure and to pack her various possessions, Haru San hinted to Somerville that it was a pity that he had not seen one of her nieces, whose eyes, she declared, were as beautiful as the stars in the sky, and whose figure was like the willows in O-Suya Park.

"But," she continued, "should your great augustly condescending eyes not remain pleased with the humble girl who is about to marry you, perhaps other more supremely excellent beautifulness might please them."

To Haru San, thought Somerville, as by Yumoto, this marriage of his was evidently not regarded seriously.



CHAPTER XII

THE LITTLE MARRIAGE AND HOME-COMING OF MIO-SAN



YUMOTO was at the Consulate punctual to the minute, for, as he used to say, "time is what a fool squanders and a wise man saves," and Yumoto was singularly wise for his age. The ceremony, if so prosaic a proceeding as that which took place before the benevolent and somewhat amused official could so be properly described, was brief enough to meet with the approval of the most retiring male.

A quarter of an hour after Somerville had entered the room with Yumoto and McKenzie, where he found Mio-San, Hoshin, and his wife awaiting him, he emerged the husband of one of the prettiest and proudest of *musumé* in Nagasaki.

Hoshin's wrinkled and generally impassive face was as overlaid with smiles as though he had sold an Imari forgery or a bit of Birmingham bronze to a Yankee tourist for a long price. The present of twenty yen which his wife had received from Somerville for Mio-San's board and lodging was looked upon by both him and her as a direct commission upon the little marriage they had just witnessed. Their only regret was that the "goods" had not been one of their own nieces.

McKenzie's wedding gift to the bride had been a magnificent *obi* of apricot-coloured satin on which irises were embroidered, and his gift to the bridegroom a box of excellent cigars. Yumoto had placed a roll of *satsu* in the bride's hand immediately the ceremony was concluded, and had informed the bridegroom that a case of "very inferior whisky *sake*" awaited his pleasure up at his house. The spirit was excellent, Somerville well knew. It was only Yumoto's politeness which caused him to depreciate his gift.

French fashion, the bridal party, consisting of Yumoto, a *musumé* to whom he was just then paying attention, McKenzie, and Folkard, visited a restaurant for *ban-meshi* (dinner); after which, just as the sun was setting behind the hills opposite the foreign settlement, turning the water of the harbour into a lake of blood, and the sky into a riven glory of crimson and gold, Somerville and Mio-San set out for Sunset View, which was the Japanese name of their home Englished.

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Mio-San was tired, though radiant with happiness, which took many quaint and amusing forms of expression. During the dinner at the restaurant nothing would persuade her to permit the attendant *geisha* to wait upon her "augustly condescending husband." Over the quaint tea ceremony, which, except to Yumoto and herself, was of so bewilderingly a complicated nature, she lingered lovingly. For did not proficiency in its mysteries furnish a testimony of her excellent upbringing? Then when the meal was finished and O Matsu San, O Tome San, and O Ai San—whose names were so singularly appropriate to the wedding entertainment—had danced and sung in the most classical if excruciating *gaku*, the party broke up.

It was a long walk from the restaurant to Somerville's home, and so as Mio-San was tired a *kago* (hammock) with two sturdy bearers was hired, and amid polite expressions of goodwill from Yumoto and good wishes from McKenzie and Folkard the newly-married pair started on their homeward way. Through the narrow streets of the native town, and then through those of the settlement, then upward through tree-enshadowed roads and paths the tiny procession climbed.

The *kago* bearers were strong and Mio-San was light, and so Somerville had to use his best endeavours to keep pace with the bare-legged and scantily-clad men whose backs were tattooed with wondrous designs of fishes, dragons, and grotesques in light blue ink. At length the upper road was

reached, and the *kago* and its bearers came to a halt outside the little bamboo gate which led into the lower end of Somerville's garden. Mio-San dexterously unpacked herself from a position which to a European lady would have been torture, and slid from beneath the matting roof of her palanquin. Somerville, who had paid the men so generously that they called down interminable blessings upon his "augustly wise head," pushed open the little gate, and taking Mio-San's hand in his led her up the garden path.

In the oncoming dusk the beauties of this little domain amid the cryptomerias, pines, and maples were rendered but half apparent, but along one side of the path gleamed almost ghostly the pale-flowered irises looking like huge moths hovering in the cool night air amid a miniature forest of spears. The quaint trees on the other side of the path were weird and mystic in the shadows thrown by the higher pines, and Mio-San on catching sight of them drew closer to Somerville. The perfume of the cooling earth and of flowers filled the air, and the gentle sighing of the breeze in the pines made nature music as they advanced up the path.

"The honourable moon will soon be up," said Mio-San softly, "and then the garden will be still more beautiful, O my augustly big husband. Even the cicadæ are singing a welcome."

Somerville looked down at her upturned face and smiled. In the pearly twilight it was radiantly beautiful with happiness and content. He drew

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her towards him and kissed her. The almost shadowy little figure with its mystically glowing face appealed to his sense of the beautiful. Surely this marriage of his was destined to last? Yumoto's sceptical face had haunted him almost all the way up from the town, and it was only when he and Mio-San were alone in the twilight of the exquisite garden that the doubts Yumoto and even McKenzie had conjured up began to dissipate.

"Are you happy, little Mio-San?" he asked gently.

"Great much happy," was her reply. "No more Katakuri San to scold, no more Katakuri San to drive me away from your side, O most augustly shining one."

Somerville laughed. Mio-San's happiness seemed to depend upon such simple things.

A turn of the path, and the house came into view, ablaze with a galaxy of paper lanterns which Shi-wono and a sympathetic coolie who had brought up Mio-San's luggage earlier in the day had hung along the whole front of the verandah, and lit up against the dark green background of the trees.

Mio-San gave an exclamation of delight, which brought Shi-wono, who had been on the *qui vive* for an hour or more, out on to the verandah in welcome. The light from the red, orange, and moon-white paper lanterns fell upon the iris beds beneath the verandah, danced in tinted zigzags upon the path leading to the house, and shone in mimic reflections in the trickling stream and tiny ponds.

"*Irasshaimashi! Oagan nasai, O-ku-Sama. Irasshaimashai!*"

To Mio-San's ears this "Welcome! please to enter, O honourable lady of the house. Welcome!" must have been sweet music. She smiled, and then, when she had climbed the short flight of steps which led on to the balcony, forgetful, perhaps, that she was the august Englishman's wife, or in politeness to Shi-wono, she slid down upon the spotless matting and made her usual prostration of welcome.

It formed an almost comical scene in Somerville's eyes, old Shi-wono in the doorway of one of the rooms which opened out on the verandah kneeling before her little mistress with her forehead resting upon the backs of her hands, and Mio-San doing exactly the same thing just on the edge of the verandah steps, with her high, lacquered clogs sticking out from beneath the folds of her beautiful *kimono*.

When this ceremony was finished Shi-wono backed into the house and Mio-San took possession.

The house, though smaller than that of Katakuri San, appeared wonderfully spacious to its little mistress, for it was her own so long as she pleased her august husband.

"Has the coolie brought my luggage?" she asked of Shi-wono ere the latter disappeared into her own apartments.

Then, when Shi-wono had explained that all the honourable lady of the house's belongings were in

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her sleeping apartment, Mio-San, eager to unpack her treasures and stow them away in the *fukuro dana* (cupboards), hastened along the verandah and entered the house.

Soon Somerville could hear the sound caused by the sliding back of panels, and Mio-San singing to herself as she untied the cords which bound the boxes in which she and Hoshin's wife had with extraordinary care packed her clothing and ornaments. During the last few days the woman in Mio-San had developed almost as quickly as the shoots of bamboo spring up in the night. In her now stirred a passion for this English husband of hers where but a month or so ago had been merely a preference, which had had its birth in little more than a feminine love of coquetry. She no longer feared Katakuri San as a rival, for with the birth of a deep love for Somerville had come the belief that she possessed him, and could hold his affection against even the shameless mistress who had driven her forth into a zone of unknown perils.

Every garment that she and old Haru San had purchased had been selected with a view to her august husband's tastes, and so that she, Mio-San, might prove a pleasant sight in his eyes. And each length of rich silk, and each delicately designed *kimono*, and each shawl of soft silk crêpe as she placed it upon the unsubstantial shelves of the *fukuro dana*, which opened in the wall like a doorway leading into another room, was an offering upon the shrine of her love.

To-morrow, she thought whilst folding the garments, she would display all the glories of them to Shi-wono. But not to-night. To-night belonged to the giver of them.

At last Mio-San's wardrobe was disposed to her full satisfaction within the *fukuro dana*, the door was shut upon the treasures, and she herself was at liberty to inspect the room more thoroughly.

To her it seemed a wonderful chamber, because it was her own. In it were a marvellous and large swing-mirror; vases which she could take a delight in filling with flowers out of the garden; a chair which extended itself in a wonderful manner; a high table for her honourable husband's convenience when shaving; a *gaku* or maxim along one of the ceiling beams, in the grooves of which ran the *karakami*; and a *kakemono* or two on the wall and in the alcove. That, with the beds and mosquito curtains, comprised the contents of the room. But not quite, after all, for in the alcove Shi-wono had arranged some flowers and grasses with skill, a meaning which when Mio-San's eyes rested upon them caused her to flush hotly, and her eyes to fall, though there was none save the impassive face of Buddha to see her in the soft, dim light afforded by the two paper lanterns.

As though afraid to remain longer alone in the spotless, partially lit room in which strange shadows seemed to her to have suddenly come into being and asserted themselves, she went out on to the verandah.

Somerville was smoking and thinking, and for the moment scarcely noticed Mio-San's approach and presence. He had been wondering what the many artist friends he had left behind him in the Quartier Latin would think of his marriage. Some would probably be amused, and others of them envious—envious, could they but see her, of Mio-San's freshness, youth, and exquisite, uncommon beauty. Youth counts for so much in the Quartier.

Down below to the right gleamed the thousand lights of the town like luminous eyes, and above all hung the radiant cloud which always marks the position of a brilliantly lit city at night. The noises came softened by the distance, save when they were augmented by the ringing clangour of a gong at some tea-house; but they were sufficient to mask the soft shoo-shoo of Mio-San's approaching footsteps, and it was not until she laid a timid hand upon his arm that Somerville realised that she was at his side.

He swung round and saw her upturned face, from which the flush had not yet entirely faded, gazing almost timidly at him, but with the dark eyes radiant and smiling. It would not, he decided, be a difficult matter truly to love Mio-San.

"All done," she said slowly; and then she added, as she saw he understood, "I love you, Mister august Englishman."

Somerville laughed and drew her to him. And for the moment she feared lest his laugh indicated that he was offended.

"*Kekko*," said Somerville approvingly, "but not Mister. Say Leslie."

But Mio-San only shook her head.

All the Englishmen who had come to McKenzie's had been "Mister," and she could not think of calling her honourable husband anything else except in Japanese. So for days afterwards Somerville was amused by Mio-San's persistence with the "Mister."

Something prompted him to inquire if she were happy, or whether thoughts of Katakuri San disturbed her mind.

"Much happy," she replied. "Katakuri San a long way. No afraid her." And when she smiled up at him he was bound to believe her.

To Mio-San her late mistress had become almost an abstraction which, once existing to her distress and discomfort, no longer did so. Love of the man at her side had effectually blotted out the past, just as it mercifully obscured the future.

In the kitchen Shi-wono was wondering how long this strange marriage would last. She had seen a good many "alliances" which had terminated with the sailing of some ship, or the home-going of the foreigner. She was a careful, calculating soul—honest enough, but determined to gather sen and yen whilst the opportunity occurred—and she had already figured out to her own satisfaction the emolument which would accrue to her from a three months', six months', or nine months' tenancy of "Sunset View" by Somerville and his wife. That what Yumoto in uncommitting phraseology termed

the "affair" should last a year seemed to her unlikely, and, besides, involved further fatiguing calculations. Whilst her master and mistress were talking on the verandah she had made her calculations over again, and satisfied by them she bethought herself of the time, and seeing it was late she sallied forth to suggest that she should shut the *amado*, and that her employers must be tired and would therefore augustly condescend to enjoy honourable tranquillity. In unadorned English, that they would retire to rest.

Somerville laughed at the old woman's motherly care, prompted, he well knew, by the desire for honourable rest upon her own part. The wrinkles in her face were deeper than they had been in the morning, and her eyes kept closing automatically as she stood awaiting his answer.

"We shall not go to our honourable rest yet," said Somerville, "but you may close the *amado* and enjoy tranquillity yourself."

"*Arigato!*" exclaimed Shi-wono, relieved that she would not be required to keep her eyes open any longer.

When she had gone, and sounds and squeaks of the sliding along of the outside shutters showed that she was closing up the house to its nightly semblance of a huge box, Somerville and Mio-San entered the room which he had set aside as a studio. In it were already placed all the curios and articles which had formerly so deeply interested Katakuri San; his easels and the lacquer cabinet with its

numerous drawers secured by a marvellously ingenious combined lock. As Somerville's eyes rested upon the cabinet he suddenly remembered Katakuri San's wedding gift for Mio-San. Should he give it her or wait till the morrow? Some instinct seemed to tell him that the gift was not likely to give pleasure, for Katakuri San could scarcely wish that to her rival, so he did not unlock the drawer in the cabinet in which the small oblong box lay.

On an easel in the far corner of the room stood the uncompleted portrait of Katakuri San, and as Mio-San's eyes fell upon it Somerville noticed that an expression of annoyance passed across her face.

"You do not like to see the picture of Katakuri San?" he asked gently.

"No, no," was the reply, expressed timidly. "She bad woman. She make me sad."

"Very well," said Somerville; "see, I will turn her away" (and, stepping to the easel, he took the canvas down and placed it against the wall), "and to-morrow I will begin to paint something more augustiy pleasing."

Now that her rival was turned face to the wall Mio-San felt happy again, and could look at all the wonderful things which were in her august husband's room.

To her mind there was no idea of dual ownership presented by this house and its contents. They belonged to the man she had married, just as she did to him. They had interest for her chiefly because they were his.

But at length even a new home and the possession of an honourable English husband could not keep Mio-San's eyelids from drooping so that their long, thick lashes lay on her cheeks when she seated herself in the "long chair" which was so strange to her, accustomed to sit upon *zabuton* placed upon the floor, and so comfortable. And soon, as Somerville busied himself in placing a few of the things in better order, he heard sounds of deep and gentle breathing which told him that she slept.

The sounds of night from the garden came so subdued by reason of the closed *amado* that there was almost a perfect stillness in the house. Then came the usual creakings and cracklings as the woodwork proclaimed the cooling of the air, and at last the sounds of scampering *nezumi* as they raced beneath the floor or ran up the outside walls.

Somerville moved about quite silently on the white matting, and wondered vaguely, when the scampering *nezumi* made more noise than usual, or when some huge, soft-winged moth fluttered down from the papered ceiling against which it had been beating its wings with a rattle like that of a miniature drum, if Mio-San, like most women, was afraid of such things. In a corner of the room the big image of Buddha, which he had picked up in the curiosity shop at the far end of the Bungomachi, sat perched on its shelf, regarding sleeping Mio-San and him with benevolent countenance and lack-lustre eyes; and as Somerville gazed at it

critically he could almost imagine that a smile of sardonic wisdom replaced that of indolent benevolence.

Still Mio-San slept. There could be no pretence about it, for, thinking that he had seen her eyelids quiver and partially unclosed, Somerville had taken one of the paper lanterns with which the room was lit and had held it over her. Although a smile—for Mio-San's dream was a happy one—flitted across her face, her eyelids neither trembled nor unclosed, and when he stooped and kissed her lightly on her brow she did not stir.

What a contrast to some of the roystering bridal nights of friends in which he had taken part in the Quartier Latin, when often day-dawn was almost seen in at some boulevard *café* ere the happy pair were escorted home by a band of fellow-students.

In the strange stillness of that house upon the Nagasaki hillside Somerville sat down to think of the life that would open with the morrow—a life to be shared with the little sleeper whose quiet breathing caused him a feeling of so restless a curiosity that he was several times upon the point of wakening her. But it was nearly midnight when a terrible assault upon the walls of the room by a host of squeaking *nezumi* caused her to start, and then unclosed her eyes, still heavy with sleep.

In a moment Somerville was at her side.

"Mio-San! Little Mio-San, do not be frightened!" he exclaimed. "The noise is only that of *nezumi*. I am here."

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But at the mention of *nezumi* Mio-San (who was a woman) started up, and, gathering the skirt of her *kimono* closely around her knees, she clung desperately to her honourably tall husband.

"*Nezumi San!*" (the honourable or Messrs. Mice, for even in her terror Mio-San did not forget to be polite), she exclaimed; "where?"

Her glance round the room was so comically, though genuinely apprehensive, that Somerville burst out into such hearty laughter that the frail paper walls of the room vibrated like drums.

Alas! the furniture of a Japanese room affords little refuge for those who fear the "august Masters Mice," and at last, when the scurrying to and fro of these monsters, which had stopped with Mio-San's scream, recommenced, with one swift look for something on which to stand, the terrified little woman, dropping the skirt of her *kimono*, literally threw herself into her honourable husband's arms.

Still laughing at her affright, he carried her, with her head nestling against his shoulder, out of the room, which had for her such noisy terrors, along the now shut-in verandah to the chamber where a bronze figure of Buddha sat enigmatically smiling on its narrow shelf, and the slatey-blue gauze mosquito curtains prepared by Shi-wono hung swaying from the rafters in the draught of air like ghostly spirits in the dim light of the paper lanterns.

The noise of the scampering *nezumi* was no longer heard, for there was no basement under this

room filled with rice or other stores to invite their presence, and Mio-San was not therefore afraid to stand on her own *tabi*-clad feet on the matting floor.

She yawned, for it was late. And then, after she had slid back the little door which masked the cupboard containing her wardrobe and taken from it a long, clinging, wide-sleeved gown of cotton, she slipped gracefully and swiftly from her *kimono* and *obi* into her night robe, and with a deft twist of her slender fingers tied the muslin sash around her waist.

Even the celerity of a model's toilette in the studio, thought Somerville, could not compare with this sudden transformation of a brilliant-hued butterfly into a sombre-coloured night-moth, as with a plaintive *moue* of fatigue and sleepiness the elf-like little figure of Mio-San disappeared beneath the semi-transparent canopy of the mosquito curtains.



CHAPTER XIII

KATAKURI SAN'S GIFT—LIKE THE POISON OF ASPS



EXT morning whilst Mio-San sat watching Somerville painting in the sunshine of the garden near the lotus pond, the latter suddenly remembered that Katakuri San's gift still lay where he had placed it in the drawer of the cabinet.

"Mio," said he, "Katakuri San gave me a gift for you. Go and fetch it; it is in the third drawer of the cabinet."

At the name of her late mistress the little wife's face clouded over as a beautiful landscape will when a cloud sweeps across the sun. Simple-minded as she was, she could yet not believe that anything the woman, who had loved and sought to entangle her august husband in her toils, had sent could bode

but ill to her and perhaps to him. And so when she rose to carry out Somerville's command, she did so without that expression of pleasure on her face that the receiving of a gift should bring.

Into Somerville's mind, engaged as he was with his work of sketching the iris pond which lay lower down the course of the little stream, no thought of ill from Katakuri San's gift entered, and he was therefore struck by the reluctance to go which Mio-San's slow progress up the garden path indicated.

She climbed the verandah steps with a strange fear in her heart, and entered the studio with misgiving. The cabinet stood against the inside wall, and the drawers were unlocked. With a trembling hand Mio-San pulled out the third from the top. In it the long, narrow box, wrapped in rice-paper and tied securely with paper string, lay.

Mio-San took it up much as she might have done had it been some venomous creature, and as she felt its weight she wondered what inimical gift the box contained.

Then, without pausing or daring to open the parcel, she went out again into the brilliant sunshine of the garden, and down the paved walk beside the streamlet and iris ponds to where Somerville awaited her.

When she reached his side she was about to hand the parcel to him, but he exclaimed, "No, no! It is yours. You must open it," and though she still would have thrust it into his hands he laughingly stood firm.

The sunlit garden gay, with the flowers of early summer, with the hum of bees, the flight of gossamer-winged dragon-flies, and noisy with the insistent whirr, whirr of cicadæ, was little in keeping with the tragic fear which possessed the heart of Mio-San as she stood hesitating to undo the package she held in her hand.

"Come!" said Somerville, "see what Katakuri San has sent you. It may be a peace-offering."

But Mio-San only shook her head.

Though so young, that in her simple house *kimono* of printed linen she looked little more than a child, her woman's heart, which had been stirred and awakened into being by love, told her that from a jealous rival such a thing was scarcely likely to come. But at length she summoned courage to unfasten the string and undo the paper, whilst Somerville looked over her shoulder the while.

The box that was disclosed when the paper was removed was of fine lacquer, on the lid of which was depicted one of the mythological-looking dolphins beloved of Japanese lacquer-workers and enamellers. With trembling fingers Mio-San slowly took off the lid as though she expected some reptile to suddenly spring out.

"*Hayaku!*" exclaimed Somerville, smiling at her serious face, and endeavouring to take the box from her.

Mio-San started back, crying "*Abunaiyo! Abunaiyo!*" ("Take care! take care!"), in alarm lest the

evil thing she half expected to find should harm him she loved.

But when she had courage to look there was nothing to be seen but a long slip of pink-hued rice-paper, such as love-letters are written upon, down the right-hand side of which ran a message.

Mio-San took it out, and underneath it lay something wrapped in folds of soft, loose-fibred packing-paper.

She read Katakuri San's message with frightened, agonised eyes, and as she did so the box dropped from her hand and fell with a sharp clatter on the paved path.

"*Doshitu?*" exclaimed Somerville sharply, stooping to pick up the fallen box.

"See! see!" cried Mio-San, holding the paper before his eyes as he stood upright.

But Katakuri San's caligraphy was none of the best, and even if it had been he could not have read her message. He shook his head and commenced to unwrap the article the box had contained.

Mio-San watched the removal of the almost interminable paper with feverish anxiety. At last the final piece was unwound, and in Somerville's hand lay a slender, exceedingly sharp dagger with its slightly curved blade glittering in the sunshine.

Katakuri's San's note had contained few words; merely "From her whose heart is flame. For use when you are cast aside after love's embers have cooled."

Mio-San went very white.



I. THE VIEW FROM THE VERANDA

In that moment the poison of asps ate into her heart, and doubt began to take form in all its pitiful agony. The strip of rose-coloured paper, on which Katakuri San's sprawling characters looked black and sinister, fluttered for a moment in Mio-San's hand and then fell from her nerveless fingers to be caught in a strong draught of air from the hills above and then borne upwards and away over the trees like the petal of some huge flower.

Although Somerville had been unable to read Katakuri San's note he gathered something of its purport from the slender, gleaming, murderous-looking thing which he held in his hand and from his little wife's pale and terrified face.

"She say your love will go soon. That the fire for me will die out of you. And then"—her eyes fell upon the thing in his hand—"there is something that will be wanted."

The man grasped the situation now like a flash. How adorable this pale-faced, frightened-eyed child looked! He would have taken her in his arms and crushed her to him, but for the keen-bladed thing he held in his hand.

One of those signal inspirations which come occasionally during crises to men such as Somerville seized him.

He took the dagger by the hilt and cried, "Look, Mio! I shall not leave you. Love does not die as Katakuri San says. This will be for you a useless thing. See!"

The dagger soared far up into the sunlit air, and

descending with a steel blue flash of blade, like a swift kingfisher to its prey, clave its way through the green-grey water of the deep, gurgling pool near which they stood.

Then Somerville turned and clasped Mio-San in his arms. But though she tried to smile there were tears in her eyes and her lips quivered, and in her heart Katakuri San's handful of tares had been sown.

The dagger lay in the mud amongst the lotus stems and roots at the bottom of the pool; the rice-paper missive containing such sorrow-weighted words had floated away across the dark-hued cryptomerias and pines whither none knew. But for the time the beauty of the day had died in the heart of Mio-San, and when she was released from her husband's embrace she fled up the small path to the house.

When she had entered her bedchamber and had closed the *shoji* behind her, she fell down prostrate before the bronze image of Buddha, and murmured one of those strange, incoherent prayers which come to the lips of women who suffer as she suffered.

The impassive Buddha, with unseeing eyes seemed to regard the little bent and swaying figure in the gloom below with an ironical smile. But Mio-San's faltering words were not addressed to Buddha or any of the thousand other gods of her race, but to some (to her) vague Being beyond the sun, moon, and stars who seemed to offer her protection in trouble.

When Somerville, becoming anxious at her long absence, came back to the house, he found her still before the image of Buddha, in front of which two little oil lamps were burning. And if Katakuri San could have but seen her rival's face she would have been satisfied.

In Mio-San's mind the subtle poison of doubt worked, for she had been told many stories by her mistress, even before Somerville arrived, of the marriages of the women of her land with foreign merchants and tourists, who took girls like herself as toys, which they deserted or cast aside when their caprice was satisfied. And recognising as she did, in her humble love for him that was her honourably condescending husband, whose voice thrilled her and whose glance of tenderness caused her heart to beat tumultuously in her breast, that he was so high above her in his august learning and wealth, the words of Katakuri San's letter had taken deep and easy root.

To Somerville's more material and masculine mind what had taken place presented only the idea of a tiny tragedy caused by a spiteful woman's keen wit. As to most men's minds a vanquished rival in love no longer exists; to most women the possibility of attack after apparent victory is often as much feared as before. And this made it impossible for him to penetrate the workings of his little wife's mind and fully realise her distress.

Whilst they were having tiffin on the verandah, Shi-wono flitted about making persistent efforts to

frustrate Mio-San's attempt to wait upon her husband herself. Although possessing the innate refinement which makes all young Japanese women so attractive, it was difficult for her at once to assume with success the rôle of "the honourable English Mister's wife," for it was with such circumlocution that Shi-wono had described her to the seller of the atrocious *daikon* whilst making her purchase of that evil-odoured commodity an hour or two before.

It was whilst tiffin was in progress, and when Somerville and she attempted to converse about the flowers and the beauties of the garden which occupied a tiny plateau in front of the verandah and then fell away in greater rusticity down the hillside, that a bright idea came into Mio-San's head. She would ask him to teach her more of his language, more than the missionary teacher at Ureshino had been able to impart to her, so that she could talk the better with him and think as he did. It was her failure in thinking and expressing her thoughts which caused her the keenest distress of mind.

There was all the world between the speech, mind, and thoughts of East and West. Such a gulf, indeed, that Mio-San trembled when now and again in some subtle word or phrasing the veil, which obscured the fact whilst they loved in silence, was lifted for a transient moment.

To Somerville, Mio-San's quaintly involved English was infinitely preferable to the more gram-

matically correct "parrot talk" of some of the *geisha* and *musumé* at Hanozono Restaurant or Sei-yo-tei, who exclaimed "I love you," without a qualifying blush, and wished him "Good morning" with the aplomb of an A. B. C. girl at home. But, secure that she would never talk as they, he fell willingly into her scheme of teaching her.

With Shi-wono's somewhat harsh voice crooning down in the basement as an accompaniment of the lesson Somerville started upon Mio-San's course of instruction. Whilst he smoked she, with solemn face, which would on occasion pucker up most comically in her efforts to "sounds good make," wrestled with a language which to her must have presented difficulties quite equalling those noted by Mark Twain relative to German. So much in earnest was she that she would not allow her attention to wander, even though a beautiful green lizard fell with one last protesting waggle of its tail from the verandah on to the stone-paved path below after a balancing feat which would have put a human acrobat to shame. Nor did she do so even when a huge spider descended his tough, silvery web within a couple of feet of her bare and inviting neck, at the peach-hued skin of which Somerville had been gazing with artistic admiration.

"I am your wife. You are my husband. Shi-wono is our cook. The coolie is running. Good morning! Good-night! House, room, book, letter," and a host of other words and phrases, some of which she now remembered to have heard at the

missionary's house in Ureshino, Mio-San said them all through with wonderful difficulty and mvellous mispronunciation. But most times ended up with rippling laughter, and "I luff yew."

At the finish she took out her little pipe, and smoked fine, light-coloured, native tobacco, almost of the hue of yellow-bronze silk. It was such a tiny plaything of a pipe that had not Somerville been already long inured to the practice of women's smoking he would not have had the heart to forbid her. Three or four whiffs, and then the small bowl, scarcely larger than an acorn-cup, was knocked with a sharp pin-pin against the metal edge of the *tabako-bon*, and Mio-San's smoke was finished for the time being.

The afternoon sun was now falling into the garden slantwise over the tops of the taller pines, throwing long shadows across the iris ponds and trickling streamlet, and giving the azalea blossoms under the trees a chastened colour. And on to the matting floor of the verandah the lilac wistaria, which swayed in the gentle air outside, threw deep shadows like enormous and elongated catkins. It was the hour for tea, and so Mio-San rose with a smile, exclaiming, "Tea !"

And when she saw that Somerville hesitated she added persuasively in Japanese, "Most excellent for honourable weariness it is." And he, having heard Katakuri San use the same phrase on a like occasion, understood, and smiled back, "*Gokura sama*" ("Many thanks for your kind thought").

Ere Mio-San returned, bearing the tray with its tiny cups, of which so many were required to slake her big husband's honourable and august thirst, sounds of footsteps coming up the garden path caused Somerville to turn in his chair and look out through the verandah balustrading.

A rockery and some dwarf trees upon it obscured the turn of the path, and it was not till some moments had passed that Yumoto came into view, hot and somewhat breathless from his climb up from the town.

"Good afternoon," he called out. And then he used a word which is typically English and seldom heard in Japan. "You are high up, my honourable marriedness," he went on, as he puffed up the verandah steps and sank down into one of the deck-chairs. "But in climbing to it I am become as hot as in the fires of Kwakkto Jigoku. Have you yet had time to spare from O Ku Sama to open a bottle of the miserable whisky *sake* I sent you?"

Never had Somerville been asked for a drink so delicately.

He clapped his hands, and from the back part of the house came the long-drawn-out "*Hai-i-i-i-tadaina*" of Shi-wono.

"I have," said Somerville, glancing with a smile at his recumbent friend; "you shall taste it. But it is not inferior, but excellent."

Yumoto received the information as though he expected it, and watched for the coming of Shi-wono, who at length appeared, to vanish again like

a jack-in-the-box when she comprehended what was required.

"And how is O Ku Sama?" asked Yumoto, with interest. "Is it yet you are not convinced that you should have had her on approval? He was a wise man, though he lived in the West of the world, who said marriedness is like putting one's hand into a bag in which there are many serpents and one eel, and a man has good fortune if he grasps the eel."

"He was a cynic," rejoined Somerville, "and you are only a philosopher. But I have something to tell you."

Then he gave Yumoto an account of Katakuri San's gift to Mio-San.

Yumoto was silent for a minute or two. And then, after he had poured himself out a drink from the bottle Shi-wono had placed at his side on the *zen*, he said slowly, "Katakuri San is not the eel, but the other thing. It is well that the gift was sent wrapped in paper, and not in Mio-San's heart. But," he continued, to pause as Mio-San advanced along the verandah, "if you are not foolish, my august honourableness, you will not bring the women too close together."

"Welcome! I hope your august limbs are not much wearied," exclaimed Mio-San. "Please partake," and she put down the tray of tea and made the polite obeisance. Then as she raised her head from her hands she noticed the whisky *sake*, and smiled. As the honourable lady of the house, she had for the moment forgotten what she knew

as Katakuri San's maid, namely, that Yumoto never accepted tea when whisky *sake* was available.

"August pardon deign," she exclaimed, with a smile. And then she handed Somerville the tea.

No more was said concerning Katakuri San, but as Yumoto drank his whisky *sake* in quiet content he wondered whether "Madame McKenzie" would rest satisfied with the moral stab she had inflicted with such refinement of malice upon her rival.

Whilst Somerville and Mio-San were drinking their tea, and chatting to him inconsequently about the garden and the view from the verandah, he came to the conclusion that how much ill Katakuri San was willing or able to inflict largely depended upon the opportunities Somerville and Mio-San might give her. That she had no morality to deter her from anything which malice might suggest he well knew. Her life at the restaurant in Hama-nomachi, and her dealings with its less reputable frequenters, had bereft her nature of moral fibre, and sullied her soul almost beyond redemption.

Mio-San broke in upon his reverie. "Me Engleesh quick learn speak," she said. And then she fired off a cataract of words and sentences which Somerville had been making her repeat during the afternoon.

"Love has the same language in all climes," said Yumoto, when he had finished laughing at Mio-San's wonderfully incorrect pronunciation of some words, remembering a phrase from a French novel of questionable character, "but the woman who can talk most fluently generally makes the best bargain.

Therefore, O Ku Sama," he continued, addressing Mio-San, "be augustly wise and learn to talk the tongue of your honourable master."

But such philosophy was beyond the comprehension of Mio-San, and she took refuge in a perplexed smile.

Then the two men talked of old times as men who have first met in foreign lands will, and Mio-San sat with her head resting against Somerville's knees listening for words she understood, and finding so few, that she was once more driven in upon her own sad thoughts of the gift of Katakuri San which had flashed upward and downward in the sunlight that morning, and now lay amid the water-weeds in the lotus pond.

She would have given years of her life to have understood the strange words that fell from her husband's lips—words that left her mind as dark as to their meaning as though she were deaf, and so keen a pain of non-comprehension at her heart that it caused her to clench her hands so tightly together under cover of the wide hanging sleeve of her *kimono*, that the nails bit deep into the skin of her soft, rosy palms.

At last she heard the name of Katakuri San, and a little shiver ran through her body. What was her honourable husband saying about the woman who, because of her love for him, had driven her into darkness and despair? Here and there she caught the meaning of a word, but most were spoken so swiftly that to her unaccustomed ears their meaning

was inextricably jumbled. "Love, woman, shameless, McKenzie, night, beautiful, hate, in a month or two." She heard all these; she had heard them over and over again whilst acting as Katakuri San's maid. But now her anxious, fevered mind refused to translate their meaning to her quickly enough for her to understand. Each time the words Katakuri San fell from either speaker's lips she shivered, and at length Somerville noticed it.

"Are you cold, Mio?" he asked kindly. But she did not at once realise what he said.

Yumoto repeated the inquiry in Japanese.

"*Gomen nasai!*" she said, adding quickly, "*Iye, iye.*" But though she said "No, no" in a voice which had a break of pain in it, she was cold as she had never been before.

The harvest of tares was growing apace, and the corner of the veil that hid the gulf which stretched between her and the augustly loved one against whose body she leaned had once again been lifted.



CHAPTER XIV

"A GREAT GULF FIXED"—WHAT THE "MIKUI"
SAID—A WOMEN'S DUEL



THE days passed very slowly to the little household at "Sunset View." Except for the visits of Yumoto and McKenzie, and descents upon the town made by Mio-San and Somerville, little occurred to break the monotony. But the honourable tranquillity of his existence, as Mio-San phrased it, was pleasant enough to one of Somerville's artistic temperament. He worked hard; for seldom had painter surroundings fuller of inspiration, or subjects of greater beauty of atmosphere and colour.

An exquisite pastel of Mio-San with her face half-buried in an armful of azalea blossoms, done with the daring of a true artist upon a long strip of delicate grey-toned paper, adorned one of the walls

of the studio, and his sketch-book was full of studies of her.

She proved, like most Japanese girls, an excellent model, capable of artistic and quick appreciation of pose, untrammelled by conventional ideas. And it ever she were weary, for Somerville was an exacting and somewhat cruel taskmaster in his enthusiastic pursuit of his art, she showed it by nothing more disquieting than her face. Neither by fidgetiness nor complaint.

But during these long sittings, whether in the brilliant light of the open air or in the studio with the softened radiance which filtered through half-drawn *shoji* of translucent paper, whilst Somerville sketched in rapidly or laid on his colours with a sure, deft hand, Mio-San's thoughts often reverted to the words which accompanied Katakuri San's wedding gift, and she wondered whether the glow of passion always dies if the woman sedulously fans the embers on Love's altar. Her heart asked this question over and over again which nothing save time could answer.

One day, when Somerville had taken her up the hill, that lay at the back of their house, to a little ruined pagoda and an exquisite grotto he had accidentally discovered, where she posed all the morning in the ambient shade of pines and *icho* as a nymph of the crystal spring that sparkled forth like liquid diamonds from the recesses of the grotto, he had scarcely spoken to her, so intent had he been upon his work.

She felt a growing chill of apprehension attacking her heart. Between them twain seemed to be a barrier which had not existed in the earlier days of marriage—an impalpable something which she was incapable of analysing. Into her heart crept a feeling almost of jealousy of that other woman, her idealised self, which Somerville painted with so much greater attention than he had bestowed upon the living woman who posed.

How could she explain to him her growing fears? How could she tell him in that so strangely difficult language of his what she, his humble wife, felt?—what thoughts pursued their disturbing way through her mind in the silence of the night, in the shade of the wood? Of what use were the words and phrases which she had learned so laboriously for such a need as hers? These things which had afforded her some dim insight into his thoughts and meaning when he conversed with Yumoto or McKenzie of an evening upon the verandah, failed her at the crisis of her mental needs.

Nothing suggested itself to her sad little mind save the eternal question of women concerning the men they love—"Does he love me?"

On their way down the hillside through the pines, over the soft, velvety carpet of emerald-hued moss, and grass and golden lichen, Mio-San spoke very little to Somerville, and he was absorbed in the work he had accomplished. At length he said, "Mio, did you feel cold? There was not much

sun, I fear, where you posed. I'm a selfish sort of beggar when I am painting, but you must not mind. It is only forgetfulness and not intention."

Mio-San gathered much of what he said, although she could not comprehend all. "I was not much cold in the shade of trees," she rejoined, "but——" and she paused as though unable or unwilling to continue. Somerville glanced down at her wondering. There was something eloquent in the pause.

"But?" he inquired.

"I was cold," she continued slowly, "because your eyes did not see me though they looked at me. I am always much, very much cold when you look like that."

Somerville almost laughed. There seemed something so comical in the serious way in which Mio-San regarded trifles. Hermione, Ducet, Suzanne, Stephanie, or any of the other girls or women with whom he had come in contact would either have accepted his inattention whilst he was engaged in his work as a matter of course, or had they resented it would speedily have shown him that they did.

It was very difficult to look into the heart of little Mio-San. In it dwelt the submissive spirit of the Eastern woman sublimated by the primal instinct of woman. And Somerville's mind, spirit, and eyes were of the West, and, moreover, those of a man.

They were out of the pine-wood now, and the sunshine lay in brilliant patches along the road which led down to the back of their house. So

sensitive to outside as well as inside influences was Mio-San that her spirits revived as she tripped along in her *waraji* (straw sandals), making a little cloud of reddish-brown dust. And when Somerville spoke again in half-apology for his forgetfulness she checked him with a ripple of laughter, and nestling close to his side, exclaimed, "Immense big augustness honourable pardon deign. I luff yew. You luff me much?"

"Yes, much," Somerville replied, believing that he really did, as he bent down and kissed her upturned face.

"Do it again!" begged Mio-San, who had learned to kiss much as a baby would have done, not by intuition, for the kissing instinct is non-existent or at all events dormant in Japanese women, but from seeing others do it and by practice. When Somerville had satisfied her demand she felt happy again. The contact of his lips and the sunshine had done something towards dispelling for the time that shadow which so often brooded in her heart, that distrust of the future and what it held for her, which had had its birth when she opened the box containing Katakuri San's wedding gift, and read the poisoned words which accompanied it.

They met few people along the road, for it was the hour when many of the inhabitants of the neighbouring villas would be taking hot baths in lieu of siestas. But just as they reached the turning where the path branched downwards an old man came along who, when he caught sight of Mio-San,

called out in a drooning, monotonous voice, "Give me alms, most generous and beautiful lady, that I may tell you the future." Somerville, not understanding what he said, would have passed by him, contenting himself with casting a few cash into his outstretched box, but Mio-San paused in front of the wayfarer, who was scantily clad in a ragged, dark blue cotton *kimono*, and whose feet were lacking even the cheapest of straw sandals.

"*Jiu sen dozo!*" exclaimed Mio-San.

"Ten sen? Too much," replied Somerville laughing, but giving her the coin. "What is the matter?"

Mio-San with a mysterious air gave the old man the money and drew from a division of his box a tiny slip of bamboo on which a Chinese number was written. This she handed to him with a smile and a few apologetic words to excuse herself for troubling him. The old man took the strip of wood from her, and placing it close against his near-sighted eyes he read the number.

After a minute he shook his head and ejaculated, "*Kyo!*" whilst he fumbled with stiff fingers in a little drawer which opened at the back of the box.

Somerville was watching the performance with interest. Although he only partially understood what Mio-San and the old man had said, he soon gathered that the latter was either a teller of fortunes or a "quack." When the old man said "*Kyo*" in so regretful a tone he turned to Mio-San. She stood there, with the strong sunshine

of the road lighting up the amber-tinted skin of her face and neck till it was almost transparent, with an expression of dull distress in her eyes and face.

At length the old man produced a small slip of paper which bore on its outside told the same figure as that upon the bamboo. Mio-San put out her hand for it and turned away.

With the old man's blessing for such honourable patronage in their ears Somerville and Mio-San made their way down the sloping path which led to the upper entrance to the garden.

Mio-San did not unfold the paper, but tucked it into the sleeve of her *kimono*, and when Somerville asked her what it was she told him that it was a sacred writing. But she did not tell him how her heart had suddenly turned heavy as lead at the old man's words, although but a short while before the sunshine and his kisses had made it so tumultuously light with happiness.

At last they reached the house in silence, for Somerville's vocabulary was not equal to the inquiries he would have made. He put away his painting things, and whilst he was doing so Mio-San retired to her room, and taking out the small piece of paper she proceeded to read it. It did not take her long to do so. "Whoever draws this *mikuji*," it ran, "will be well advised in obeying the heavenly law, and so should also Kwannon the Most Merciful be continually worshipped. If he who draws this is sick he shall have yet more

sickness. If he has had losses, yet more heavy ones shall come to pass for him. If he love a woman or she a man they shall neither win nor retain the love. Only by most diligent prayers can the unlucky one escape calamities the most terrible. For the drawer of this *mikuji* there is no enduring happiness."

When she had finished spelling out the printed characters Mio-San gave a startled little cry, which brought Somerville hurriedly along the verandah to see what was the matter.

"*Doshu?*" he exclaimed, thrusting back the *shoji* hastily and entering the room.

Mio-San had heard his footsteps, and she had instinctively thrust the piece of paper into her sleeve-pocket. Then she had fallen on her knees facing the *kamidana* (shelf for the gods) which Somerville had allowed her to erect in a small recess. She knew that he never interrupted her devotions, though sometimes he had made good-natured fun of Buddhism when talking to Folkard or McKenzie. Whilst she knelt he would not expect her to tell him what had made her cry out, and so when he called out, "What is the matter?" on entering she did not reply.

After glancing at the little figure which was kneeling with slowly moving lips in the softened light, Somerville withdrew, wondering what that shrill cry had meant, and for the moment not connecting it in any way with the old mendicant they had met along the road.

Softly under her breath Mio-San murmured "*Enmei sakusai*" ("May we enjoy long life and sorrow not trouble us"); "*kanai anzen*" ("Grant that our family may be preserved"); "*ka-ci-manzoku*" ("That this house may for ever be fortunate"); and then a prayer that "for ever my august husband may dwell with me and regard me favourably."

Over and over again, with her eyes sometimes closed and at others fixed upon the little shrine, Mio-San prayed, but deep down in her heart there was an element of superstition which bred the thought that all these words would be useless to prevail against the ill-fortune foretold by the *mikuji*.

She knelt repeating these silent prayers so long that Somerville was about to seek her when he saw McKenzie and Katakuri San coming up the garden walk.

This was the first visit that the latter had paid, and she had spent several hours that morning in her preparations. As she came up the path a little in advance of McKenzie, who had stopped a moment to inspect the iris-bed, her lacquered clogs inlaid with pieces of mother-of-pearl and highly-polished metal flashed from beneath the skirt of her *kimono*. And what a *kimono*! It was one that in a fit of exceptional generosity McKenzie had purchased for her at O Tama's shop in Tera-machi. Of a deep orange satin, embroidered with sprays of wistaria in pale mauve and gold thread, it set off her bold and brilliant type of beauty to perfection. But, as Somerville thought, it did not look the garment of

a virtuous woman. Her mass of blue-black hair was wonderfully arranged, so that from the back it almost resembled a huge black butterfly with "eyes" of green and gold where the jade and gilt-headed pins glinted. Katakuri San's skin shone with an amber glow beneath the nacre-like film of *poudre de riz* and rouge which it had taken her so long a time to apply entirely to her satisfaction. She was exquisitely beautiful in a meretricious way; but that was the only manner in which she cared to be beautiful.

As Somerville got up out of his lounge-chair to greet her she called out "*Kon nichi wa*" so loudly that the sound reached Mio-San kneeling at her devotions. The voice startled her as though she had been struck. By what strange freak of circumstance had Katakuri San arrived on the very afternoon that her little rival had been plunged into gloomy forebodings by the unlucky drawing of the *mikuji*? Mio-San rose hastily from her knees. What was the use of these prayers to Kwannon whilst her enemy was laughing with her husband? She glanced in the polished mirror, whose beautiful back had charmed Somerville so greatly that he scarcely bargained for its possession, and she saw at a glance that her face was colourless, and that there were circles left by her distress of mind beneath her eyes, which shone so brightly with unshed tears. She could not go forth to meet Katakuri San's scrutiny thus. There was scarcely time to make her toilet properly, but she sat down before the

mirror with her little dressing-table of acacia and camphor-wood in front of her, and set to work.

Outside on the verandah Katakuri San was being installed in one of the deck-chairs, and was laughing musically during the process. It was not until McKenzie had sauntered up and mentioned Mio-San's name that she remembered to inquire if O Ku Sama (the honourable lady of the house) was at home and well.

"Yes," replied Somerville, "she is both. She is in her room. I will call her."

"Do not honourably trouble yourself," said Katakuri San, laughing, and glancing up at him archly.

But he called out "*Mio! Mio! Oide nasai!*" all the same; and in a moment or two came the answering call, "*Hai-i-i! tadaima.*"

Katakuri San leant back in her chair and regarded Somerville narrowly. Her life at the restaurant in Ima-machi had made her a keen observer of men and their moods. Now she was engaged in attempting to discover whether the man she herself so much admired and had sought to ensnare was content with her rival.

McKenzie broke the silence by inquiring whether Somerville had finished a picture which he had seen him painting one morning on the Bund. It was a large canvas depicting some Murotsu fishermen and women idling and gossiping on one of the quays.

"Yes," replied Somerville, "I finished it off last

week. It's in the studio. Would you care to see it?"

McKenzie jumped up. "I should," said he, "and perhaps when we return we shall find O Ku Sama has come out."

When the two men walked along and entered the studio Katakuri San had at first been inclined to follow them, but just as she was about to do so Mio-San appeared at the end of the verandah and advanced towards her.

She had exchanged the cotton *kimono* which she had worn in the earlier part of the day for the beautiful one she wore at her wedding, and although her eyes bore some slight traces of distress they were bright and smiling, for in the stillness of her own room she had had time to think, and decide that she would meet her enemy with a smile upon her face, whatever might lie at the bottom of her heart.

Katakuri San, notwithstanding that the advancing girl was once her maid, rose and politely inquired after her health, whilst the latter slid on to her knees, and with the word "*Irasshaimashi*" on her lips, made her elaborate obeisance.

Before she did so, however, she had had time to remark with what care her visitor had attired herself, how exquisitely beautiful, though so artificially enhanced, her face was. It was truly, as San-to had once said, "the face of one who eats men." Her dark eyes told the sad, ineffaceable story of an impure soul.

Mio-San sat down opposite her visitor and regarded her furtively, a fact of which the latter was by no means ignorant. It was the measuring of swords by two duellists ere the attack. The voices of the two men came indistinctly from the studio hard by, and the noise of the *ji-i-i-i-i* of the summer cicadae in the bushes near the verandah formed a strident chorus. Katukuri San noticed the dark circles under Mio-San's eyes, which even the *poudre de riz* could not successfully disguise, and she thought they told a different tale to the true one. Her mean heart beat with satisfaction. This marriage was evidently already, though scarcely more than a couple of months old, a failure. Perhaps, even, Somerville had beaten the girl who sat facing her and saying nothing. She herself had been beaten by a man once. That was in the days of her life at the *chaya*.

At length she said in Japanese, with a smile, "You, O honourable lady, look marvellously happy. This house is beautiful to the sight, and far more good than my miserable dwelling."

Mio-San flushed red. She knew that her adversary's keen eyes had long ago detected the subterfuge of the *poudre de riz* and the fact that she was not looking happy. But she steadied her voice and replied, "The august condescension of your honourable self is wrong. My house is but a miserable place not worthy that you should visit it. But tea is good for august weariness." And she clapped her hands to summon Shi-wono.

"Is your honourable husband still good to you?" queried Katakuri San boldly, "or do you find that he is away much?"

"I am unworthy of his august love and forbearance with my lamentable ignorance," replied Mio-San sadly; "but his goodness is like the sun, and his words to me like the flowers of spring after the winter of weariness."

"*Kekko! kekko!*" ejaculated her hearer ironically. And then she leant forward and addressed Mio-San almost in a whisper.

"Listen! very wise one. I have known the foreign men, for have I not seen many when I was the star they came to gaze at and whisper words of love to before I married Kumataka. The kind words and the love last just so long as their hearts are turned toward one—a day, a week, a month, a year sometimes. But then one must know how to flatter them and how to pull them back when some other eyes suddenly seem brighter and some other voice sweeter. And you, what do you know of them?"

Mio-San was silent. In her heart the old fear was reviving as Katakuri San artfully heaped fuel on the smouldering fires of distrust. All the stories of deserted *geisha*, of abandoned *musumé*, that San-to when in garrulous mood had told her came rushing back to her recollection, and she shivered.

"But there is always," continued Katakuri San, "death. It is but a moment, and then one does not

know any more sorrow. When your honourable foreign husband descends to the town, it may be to look into the eyes of another who had bewitched him into thinking her more beautiful than thou art, what is there for you?"

Mio-San did not reply. What could she say? The woman whose face was so near hers, because she in speaking had sat up in her chair and rested her face upon her hands, was so beautiful and yet talked of the faithlessness of men.

Mio-San would have gladly risen and made some excuse for leaving her guest, but none suggested itself to her tortured mind. She could only sit still and listen, and wonder if Katakuri San could be wrong when the *mikuji* had foretold evil and sorrow also.

"You cannot talk your honourable husband's tongue," Katakuri San went on, "nor he yours but a little; then how can you hope that he will remain by your side?"

All the old knowledge of the gulf which yawned at times between her and him when she failed to comprehend his meaning was re-awakened in her mind. She was about to exclaim that she would cling to him, would not let him go though he should trample upon her, would strive to learn that most difficult tongue in which he spoke to his foreign friends, when Somerville's voice fell upon her ears. That loved voice, so clear and deep that it seemed to her like the music of the river which ran near her old home at Ureshino,

recalled her to herself, and made her for the time at least brave and strong.

She rose, and stooping so that Katakuri San could hear her, she said in a low, distinct tone, "Listen, O Katakuri San. You sent me a gift the day I became the wife of O Somerville San. I thank you. It was a useful gift for a fool. But when it fell out of the box on to the stone of the path down yonder I felt I should have no use for it. And so my honourable husband cast it far away into the air, and it fell down and down till it plunged into the depths of the pool in which the lotus bloom and sank. It now lies in the mud at the bottom. I shall never need it. I have not known many foreign men. But the one I know is my husband."

For a minute or more Katakuri San sat rigid with astonishment. Her gift she at length realised—for she could not know the wound it had made in the recipient's heart—lay in the mud at the bottom of a pool. Perhaps even Somerville had laughed at her folly as he cast it away, so that Mio-San could never be reminded by its presence of the use for which it was intended.

Mio-San's face was flushed now and her eyes bright. She had made her reply, and she knew that it had told. What Katakuri San could not know was how that dagger, deep though it lay at the roots of the lotus and water-weeds, often wounded her still.

There was something almost tragic in the pose of the little figure as she finished speaking, and

the two men noticed it as they came along the verandah.

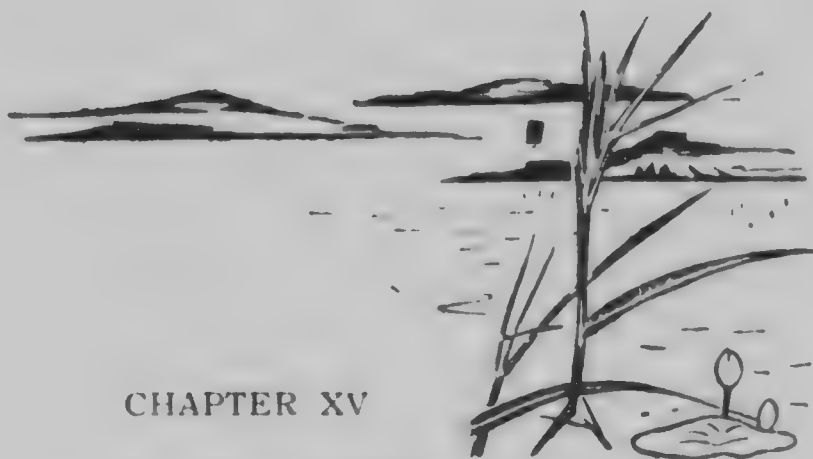
"Hullo!" exclaimed McKenzie, "what have our wives been up to? Mio-San looks like some small tragedy queen and Katakuri like a discomfited rival."

Somerville laughed, and before he could glance at Katakuri her face was wreathed in smiles.

"A devilish fine picture," said McKenzie, sinking into a chair and lighting a cigar.

"Which? Mine or our wives?" asked Somerville.

"Both."



CHAPTER XV

WHAT BOMMATSURI BROUGHT FORTH— THE OTHER WOMAN



THE iris blooms had shrivelled and become brown, and the lotus buds were large upon the jade-green surface of the ponds. In a week or two they would blossom forth and float like rose-pink cups of finest porcelain in the brilliant sunshine of August.

Katakuri San had not paid Somerville and his wife another visit, nor had Somerville fallen in with her suggestion that he should come over to McKenzie's and finish the incomplete portrait. But though Mio-San was troubled no more by the visits of her rival, the chill fear and distrust in her heart had not decreased, but rather the reverse. Every now and again the same subtle barrier, caused by race and upbringing, came

between her and Somerville, thrusting them apart. During the first few weeks which followed his marriage he was scarcely conscious of the fact himself. His temperament was such that, satisfied for the time by her freshness, innocence, and beauty, he looked for nothing deeper and so did not miss the lack of it.

It was on the third day of *Bommatsuri* (the Festival of the Dead) that Somerville suddenly became aware that Mio-San failed to interest him as formerly. She was kneeling in her room before the little *butsuma* (shrine), in which on the first day of the Festival tiny new mats of the finest rice-straw woven expressly for the purpose had been placed. He was in the studio before the cabinet tearing up letters; a few more lay at the bottom of the drawer, the contents of which he had been turning over. They were from Violet Desborough, and as he picked one up and read it through his mind seemed instinctively to follow up a train of thought which was chiefly concerned with the difference that existed between the writer and Mio-San. The latter he knew had little in common with the former, and alas! little in common with him. This sudden realisation by him of the unbridgable chasm which lay between Mio-San and himself seized hold of him with an acute stab of painful knowledge. She, woman-like, had long been conscious of the growing chill of his caresses, of his looks, of his words; but he, man-like, had only till just now half-realised the fact. All the wisdom which Yumoto

had dropped upon the subject of serious marriage at various times prior to and after his wedding of Mio-San came back to him. Little defects of intelligence, little habits which at first pleasing him by reason of their novelty had of late become almost tiresome ; humble efforts to show her love for him which, when he was cold and thoughtful, worried him insensibly, came in serried array before his mind. One of those sudden awakenings to facts which come at times to natures such as his now assailed him with sickening intensity. He realised that he no longer loved Mio-San. Had it been a vase for which he no longer cared, it could have been broken, or if valuable sold or given away. But Mio-San was a permanent object for which his affection had waned, and according to the ordinary code of morals there was no way out.

Like the memory of a desire for some half-forgotten perfume, the English girl who had loved him and whom he had nearly loved came back to assume importance in his life and interests. In him had taken place one of those strange re-incarnations of sentiment which needed the death of merely artistic and physical love to nourish it and bring it again into being.

Did Mio-San know ? he asked himself. And then little incidents in their life of the last few weeks—the tears which had once or twice glistened in her dark eyes, the flush of pain which had stained her face at some little act of indifference came back to him. He had nothing save pity in his heart for her,

but of what service was pity to a woman in circumstances like hers? And then as he stood with Violet Desborough's letter in his hand he blamed himself. He should have known better. He had been foolish, obstinate. The impulse of pity had cheated him into believing that the sentiment he felt was something deeper than admiration for a beautiful object which happened to be a woman. The way out? He must think. Surely there must be some.

Out in the garden the silvery blue of oncoming night made all mysteriously beautiful, and the whirring ji-i-i-i-i of the cicadae swelled to a shrill crescendo, to die away slowly. And then from the dimness of the woods or the twilight vault above them came the dolorous note of the *hotologisu* like one crying in pain—the mystic bird believed by many to be a wandering spirit from the Land of Darkness where the honourable ghosts rest awhile on their weary pilgrimage to the dominion of the King of Death.

In Mio-San's heart, as she knelt before the tiny *batsuna* which she had bought and carried with such reverent care up the hillside from the town, the sad note of the *hotologisu* awakened a strange longing for her home beside the river at Ureshino and the sight of her mother's face. She rose to her feet with a little shudder of superstitious dread and hurried along the verandah to Somerville.

"Have you heard the cry of the *hotologisu*?" she asked as she pushed back the *shoji*. "It is bad to hear it," and then she lowered her voice to the

whisper in which she addressed Kwannon the Merciful, and added, "The thing is a spirit from the Land of the Beloved Ghosts. It calls to-night because the moon is big, and the offerings to the dead must be made."

Somerville glanced at her frightened face and laughed. He did so not from callousness, but because his own nerves for the moment had been shaken by the weird cry. "No, no," he replied, rising and kissing her lightly, "it is only the *hototogisu*. Only a bird. Come, light the lanterns quickly and let us be going, or we shall be late for *Bommatsuri*."

Mio-San took the lanterns from the corner—two huge white ones like the big moon that was rising outside—and lit them. Then they passed along the verandah and away down the garden path, bound for the town below, leaving behind them the exquisite lanterns which Shi-wono had suspended at sunset over the entrance to the house bedecked with paper streamers and beautifully painted with flower emblems, which for the two previous nights had hung quivering in the night air to guide the feet of the beloved returning ghosts.

Through the garden, now thick with blue shadows, went Somerville and Mio-San, their lanterns swaying from the slender bamboo sticks to which they were fastened, and glowing silvery white in the gloom, and then out of the little wicket gate and down the steep sloping road to the town.

Away on the hillsides gleamed hundreds of twinkling lights marking the cemeteries where thousands of relatives of the departed ones were gathered to pay their devotions to the visiting spirits. And down below gleamed the stilly surface of the harbour with a sheen like that of a black pearl, upon which at midnight would be launched the tiny boats of barley-straw plaited close, filled with the best offering of food their owners could afford, lighted by miniature lanterns at the prow, and with glowing joss-sticks in the stern, and containing written paper on which were inscribed messages of faith and love for the visiting spirits, to aid whose return to Shadowland they were intended.

Neither Somerville or Mio-San spoke much on their way down the steep road which led into the brilliantly lit town. She was thinking of the ghosts of honourable ancestors, and wondering if the flower offerings, and sprigs of *shikimi*, and *lespedza*, and choice food in the tiny bowl which she had placed upon the white rice-straw mats in her little shrine would have pleased them. He was wondering over the strange fact that the dainty little figure which looked so fragile in the dim light of the lanterns should in so short a while for him have lost so much of her interest and charm.

Just as they reached the bottom of the road Mio-San stumbled, and to save her he threw his arm around her. Her lantern fell and became extinguished. To Somerville the incident suddenly presented itself as symbolical. To Mio-San it was

yet another warning that evil was in store for her. In the gloom of the road, on which their dark shadows danced, thrown by the light from the swaying lantern, so that they became elongated and enormous, she clung to him in childish terror, and pressed her face close against his shoulder.

"Why are you afraid?" he asked, steadying himself and her, and about to release his grasp so that he might recover the extinguished lantern.

"Fear has taken hold of me," was the trembling reply, "because I know that ill-fortune comes to me now that your love is cold for me."

A wave of compunction for the indifference which he had felt of late swept through him, and he kissed her tenderly, telling her the while that she was wrong, and that he loved her as before. But she scarcely heeded the words, for her woman's heart could not be deceived.

"Why did you cast the gift of Katakuri San away?" she asked. "When the love of one's august beloved one no longer burns for her the woman welcomes such a gift as hers."

There was no answer, and after a moment's pause, during which Somerville relighted the lantern in silence, they continued their way down into the outskirts of the town.

Past some sheds used for the storage of rice, straw, and farm produce they went, and then they suddenly found themselves in the winding, ill-paved and narrow street which led into the wider one running westward towards the Bund. Even

this usually comparatively unfrequented thoroughfare was ablaze with lanterns, torches, and lamps placed outside the tiny queerly-shaped shops to illuminate the goods which were spread out on temporary stands.

From the tragic little incident of the hillside the two players in it were transported by the irony of fate into the midst of a happy, laughing throng. The strident cries of the street merchants, selling the lotus flowers, real or of paper, which were used to decorate the tombs on the hillside, the altars of temples and of household shrines, the shallow plates of red earthenware for the use of ghosts, the *Bon* lanterns which serve to guide their silent footsteps, and the little straw horses for them to ride, rose above the sharp ring of *geta* as women and girls hurried along over the ill-laid paving stones. And the murmur of voices came like that of surf breaking on the shore of Nomo Saki. "*Hasu-no-hana! Hasu-no-hana!*" "*Ogara!*" "*Karawake!*" "*Karawake-ya!*" "*O-yasui!*" sounded the voices of the sellers as Somerville and Mio-San pushed their way through the throng. To do this it was necessary for her to cling on to his arm "like honourable foreign women," as she at first used to describe it. At contact with him and surrounded by the throng of hurrying pedestrians, and amid the brilliant gaiety of the beautiful coloured lanterns, a feeling of transient content and happiness flowed through her like the slow-returning tide over some arid shore.

Near the junction of Nishiyama Go with one of the narrower transverse streets they ran up against McKenzie and Katakuri San, the latter bearing a huge white lantern on which was a spray of exquisite pink chrysanthemums. Katakuri San would have passed by them with a "*Kon-ban-wa ! Gokigen yo gozaimas !*" but McKenzie stopped.

"Hullo !" said he ; "I should have come up to see you to-night, but Katakuri wished to go and worship at the tombs of her own or some one else's ancestors, and we are going thither."

Then he fumbled in his coat-pockets, whilst a band of laughing *musumé* sweeping round the corner of the street jostled him good-humouredly, and at length he produced a letter.

"This is for you," he continued, holding it out to Somerville. "It arrived this morning addressed to our house. I should have brought or sent it up to-morrow."

"Thanks," exclaimed Somerville, taking it and glancing at the handwriting. It was from Tokio, and he suddenly remembered that a week or two ago he had been expecting it. He thrust it in his pocket and nodded to McKenzie, whose arm Katakuri San had been pulling impatiently for some minutes past. She had not spoken to Mio-San except in greeting, which common politeness made obligatory, and was evidently anxious to go.

A great concourse of people now wending their way from the lower streets up Nishiyama Go swept them apart. McKenzie's hand was waved above

the heads of the little women and men who engulfed him, and his strong, deep voice rang out "*Sayonara!*" and then, with the echo of the same word from Somerville, Katakuri San and he passed out of sight.

Borne along by the crowd Somerville and Mio-San at last reached O-Suwa Park. Thousands of lanterns danced beneath the pines and cherry-trees, and the tea-houses were crowded with laughing, happy throngs of customers. Beneath the pines outside of the most popular resorts were *musumé* in exquisite clothing seated on improvised benches swinging their paper lanterns to and fro so that the soft radiance from the illuminated sides fell in quaint patches on their happy faces. High up, above all the clangour of the *geta*-shod feet of the women, the hum of many voices, the blaze of lights around tea-house and booth, stood the Temple, also lit so that from the harbour below it must have looked like a fairy palace *en fête*. Up the flight of wide steps between the huge lichen-stained lanterns of stone swayed a living ladder of people carrying lanterns, and struggling to preserve a foothold. Once more in the midst of this immense throng there crept into Mio-San's heart the aching feeling of loneliness and isolation from Somerville, the carking sense of her ostracism from his thoughts and life.

Amid all this brilliant Festival of dead humanity was for her the sad festival of a dead love. The chill of the myriad graves upon the

hillsides above them, which stretched through pine-woods and avenues of giant cryptomerias, descended upon her—the ghosts of the happy first days after marriage, the ever-returning ghosts for her which would not depart.

At last they reached the terrace of the temple. Down below them lay the town brilliantly lighted, and from it came the low murmur of the moving multitudes like the sigh of wind in the pines. At Ohata the people were already gathering in preparation for the last tender rite of the Festival—the launching of the tiny, phantom fleets which throughout the countryside would be set adrift on lake, river, and creek to go floating to the open sea. Every now and again the gong of a temple sounded musically, telling of some offering or prayer; and in the deep, blue vault of sky sprinkled o'er with a diamond dust of stars the white-faced moon was swinging slowly upward to the zenith.

Mio-San leaned upon the balustrade running along the terrace sad at heart amid all the bustle of throbbing, hurrying life which surged along the paved walk below and around her. Somerville stood beside her gazing out upon the mystic beauty of the scene, wondering why by some sport of chance this Festival of the honourable dead should seem like the end of love between him and Mio-San.

Mio-San's cold little hand stole along the rail of the balustrade and touched his arm, almost furtively, as though she feared that her doing so would dis-

please him. He took it gently in his own, but it brought no answering thrill ; the indescribable magnetism of the past was lacking.

"You are cold," he said. "Let us go."

But Mio-San shook her head. It was better even here, she thought, than up there in the lonely house on the hillside. Here occasionally some dropped words of passers-by, some sight, some movement of the crowd around or of the darker mass of people streaming up the wide flight of steps leading to the terrace on which they stood, diverted her attention for a moment or two from her own sad thoughts.

"Iye, iye!" she exclaimed, shaking her head, adding, after a moment's pause, "*Arigato, atsukute shikata ga nai*" ("Thanks, it is quite hot").

But even in the heat of a summer night he felt she was chill, and so he insisted upon walking about.

All the while the heart of Mio-San was saying over and over again, "We are two persons. He walks at my side and I at his, but in him there is a mystery ; something has happened which I cannot understand."

To Sonnerville all was so strange, wonderful, and beautiful that he felt no need of companionship or conversation. Past them ran with tiny, ringing steps a bevy of *musumé*, each bearing an exquisite lantern fashioned like the partly open bloom of the lotus and swinging in a golden hoop. Beneath the rosy pink flower was the cup of green paper, and in its heart glowed the tiny lamp which illuminated it.

One of the *musumé* held hers up to him so that he might inspect it, and as she turned to pass along after her companion she glanced at Mio-San's face. With a word or two, which brought a red flush of colour into the cheeks pale by weariness, she smiled wickedly at Somerville and hurried away.

"What did she say?" questioned Somerville.

But Mio-San did not inform him, though her heart burned to do so.

From the temple, the curving eaves of whose roof were hung with lanterns, the worshippers were flocking out—some bound homewards, some to Ohata near the head of the harbour, where an hour or so later about midnight would take place the launching of the *shoryobune*—boats of the blessed ghosts.

At the end of the terrace, almost in the shadow of a tall upstanding pine away from the crowd, Somerville remembered the letter McKenzie had given him, and took it from his pocket. Some one had left a lighted lantern shaped like a fish hanging on a small tree, and by its light he read it, whilst Mio-San watched his face intently.

It ran :—

"KOJI-MACHI, TOKIO,

July 11, 19—.

"DEAR MR. SOMERVILLE,—I was glad to get your last letter telling me of all the interesting things you have been seeing, doing, and painting. Alas! that I am now not likely to see the latter, at least until you make up your mind (if you ever do) to leave

Japan and return to England. We are in the midst of all the horrors of leavetaking and packing up. All my dear little Japanese girl friends are bringing me the sweetest and quaintest of souvenirs, at the number of which my good and generally amiable uncle is gradually becoming alarmed.

"I have but little time for writing this letter, so please excuse its shortness and perhaps incoherence. I wonder if you would care to make the acquaintance of my 'august relatives,' to revert to Japanese phraseology? If you would, I find the steamer will stop for a few hours at Nagasaki on her way to Hong-kong, and we shall be pleased to see you. I suppose there is no chance of your return as yet to Europe?

"We have been fortunate enough to get good state-rooms on the *Empress of China*, which is due at Nagasaki on the 21st. I shall quite hope to see you on board unless you have gone away into the country to paint.

"With kind regards,

"Believe me,

"Ever yours sincerely,

"VIOLET DESBOROUGH.

"Leslie Somerville, Esq.

"PS.—Do come and see me if you can."

Whilst he was reading the letter an expression of such pleasure passed across his face that Mio-San became nervously curious as to its contents.

"Good news it is?" she questioned, as her

husband folded the letter and replaced it in his pocket.

"Yes," he replied quickly; "a friend is coming here on the way back to my land."

"A she-friend?" queried Mio-San, with a sinking heart.

Somerville did not reply for a moment. He ran rapidly over in his mind the pros and cons in favour of candour. He did not wish to hurt her, perhaps she would be distressed without reason. But something in him revolted against a lie which would not have the palliating excuse that he loved the one to whom he told it. Mio-San's questioning and saddened face caused the decision to tremble in the balance; but at last he said with studied carelessness, "An honourable lady friend, but she will be here on the great *jokisen* only a few hours."

In the breast of Mio-San came a sickening sense of pain and apprehension. This friend of her august husband was perhaps a woman of his own race—one who could understand his language, who could comprehend his thoughts, who could live his inner life that she loving, striving as she did could never do. She knew that he stood outside the radius of her mental grasp, lived an inner spiritual existence of which she, groping in the darkness of insufficient knowledge, could never (though they lived side by side for many, many moons) find the key. He was a man, and therefore incapable of comprehending the jealousy of this unknown woman which tore her heart.

"I am cold, much cold," she said at last, shivering in the warm air which, laden with the odour of *senko* from the temple, came along the terrace.

"Very well," Somerville replied; "let us be going."

They walked along the now nearly deserted terrace and descended the broad flight of steps which led down into the Park, and thence, caught in the human eddy of the departing throng, they were swept along Nishiyama Go. The streets were still thick with people, and they turned into by-ways to escape the crush, and at length reached the narrow road which would take them to the foot of the hill on which their home stood. Although there had been a few *jinrikishas* in the principal streets, and the cries of the coolies who dragged them could still be heard in the distance, not a *kago* was to be seen. Except by skirting the hill and ascending it by a lengthy winding road a *jinrikisha* was no use to assist wearied Mio-San on her homeward way.

Somerville told her this kindly, and she thanked him; and then these two—a man and a woman who had so soon and tragically come to the end of love—climbed slowly up the tree-enshadowed path.

Far in the distance on the shore of the harbour near Ohata lanterns, torches, and other more fitful lights glimmered where the dark waters, lit here and there by coloured zigzag reflections of many lamps, whispered a welcome to the tiny, newly-launched

ships of the beloved ghosts—an answering murmur to the half-dispersed prayers and softened voices of the multitude. Then as they climbed yet higher and approached their home the night breeze, which swept like the gentle passing of a woman in flowing silken garments down the hillside, caught the frail craft in its embrace and carried them with the perfume of the smouldering incense they bore in their sterns out on to the bosom of the deep waters.

The lanterns Shi-wono had hung along the eaves of the verandah were flickering slowly to extinction as Mio-San and Somerville climbed up the garden path and entered their home. Even the cicadae were, for a wonder, silent.

"Good-night," said Mio-San brokenly, as Somerville turned away to enter the studio, adding under her breath, "O most beloved and augustly beautiful one."

"Good-night, little Mio," he replied listlessly, and without an embrace.

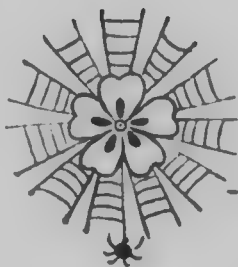
When he heard the *shoji* close behind Mio-San he cast himself into a chair to think.

What was the meaning of that sudden sense of satisfaction and even joy with which he had read of the other woman's coming? Was it the beginning of the kindling of a greater passion than Mio-San had been able to inspire? Was it love brought strangely about by the revulsion from the merely physical attraction he had felt for fresh innocence and beauty?

Who could tell ?

But in his heart stirred an intense longing for those of his own race ; for the mind which could think in unison with his own ; for the tongue which could speak without impotent searchings after unknown words. In the weakness of fatigue an exaltation seized him, and he could have called aloud for joy that it was so.

Then in the still night from the end of the verandah, on which the silvery moon threw a pure soft light, came the sound of the other woman's tears sorrowing over the mystery of a lost love.



CHAPTER XVI

THE LOOSENING OF THE BOND—THE CALL OF THE WEST



SOMERVILLE had seen Violet Desborough, and by this time the *Empress of China* was well on her way towards Colombo, when one morning he descended to the town and, walking along the Bund, entered Yumoto's office. The Chinese book-keeper, the skin of whose face, on account of its wrinkles, looked like a section of buff-coloured, tessellated pavement, informed him that Mr. Yumoto had not yet arrived. After waiting a short time Somerville heard his friend's voice outside, and a few moments later Yumoto came in, whistling gaily and smoking a cheroot.

"*Ohayo!*" he exclaimed upon catching sight of his visitor. "Why this early visit, augurly welcome one?"

"*Ohayo!*" replied Somerville, "most honourable if late to arrive friend. I wish to consult you."

"Me?" said Yumoto, with affected surprise. "Very well; follow my unworthy shadow up the stairs."

Yumoto's little private room, lit by the brilliant sunshine of an August day coming off the surface of the water of the harbour outside in golden sheets of light which flickered on the walls, looked even more garish than usual with its gaudy bills and pictures.

Somerville seated himself, took and lighted the cigar Yumoto offered him, and then there was silence.

"Well?" queried Yumoto after a slight pause, giving a keen glance at his friend's face.

The latter smoked a whiff or two without replying, and then said very slowly, "I have decided to return to England, or, at any rate, to Paris."

He looked intently at his listener to see whether any expression of surprise at the announcement would flit across his usually impassive and inscrutable face. Nothing betrayed what Yumoto thought, and it was perhaps a couple of minutes before he made any other sign than a whistle, which with him meant almost anything.

Then he remarked, "So you have tired, as I always expected, honourable but none too everything calculating friend, of your *musumé*, who must, after all, have been destined by Fate to dance *Chon Kino* and have many husbands at the house of

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Honjo the villainous. I am not surprised." Then he continued, as though a bright idea had suddenly occurred to him, "A week ago you went on board the *Empress of China*. I saw your *sampan* from the window. You were very anxious to see some one on board her, for your rowers strove hard and reached the great *jokisen's* side in advance of all others. Who was it?"

Somerville recognised that the Oriental mind of Yumoto had immediately sought a cause for the effect. He laughed a little awkwardly and said, "Some English friends. They were on their way home to England and wished to see me."

"Women friends?" queried Yumoto.

Somerville nodded, and added, "And men too."

"They do not count. But who was she? Was it the honourably beautiful girl who was on the *Orient Queen* with you when you came out?"

Somerville, since he had seen Violet Desborough and heard her voice again, and had looked into her clear, shining eyes, and had fancied that there was something more than mere pleasure at his coming in them, had been like a rudderless ship. He had been carried hither and thither by his emotions, and he had at last come to seek Yumoto's counsel and aid to solve the knotty problem which presented itself. So he recognised as he looked at his friend, when the latter finished speaking, that to admit that he had seen Violet Desborough was the best course to pursue.

So he said, "You have guessed right, Yumoto,

my friend. It was she I went on board the *Empress of China* to see. And when I saw her—well, everything else seemed blotted out. Even"—and he paused and said this almost as though ashamed and afraid lest he should be voicing an act of indescribable treachery—"my wife of the last few months up away yonder on the hillside."

"And so," said Yumoto slowly, "you have determined to leave Nagasaki—to leave Japan. Well, what is there to prevent you?"

Somerville gazed at the speaker fixedly for a moment or two, and wondered whether it was the heat of the little office or that of shame which brought the beads of sweat out thickly on his own forehead and set his heart beating irregularly.

The words came from him very slowly, "Mio-San, what of her?"

Yumoto laughed. "Mio-San," he repeated. "As I told you at first, it would have been better had you taken her as a mistress and not as a wife. But you chose your own method of acquiring her. Now you come to me and lament the fact." He paused, but Somerville did not reply. His face flushed and he opened his lips as though to speak, but contented himself with an inarticulate ejaculation, and Yumoto went on. "But why worry, there is no child? Your way is much more easy than you apparently think, my friend. Mio-San can be divorced without much difficulty if you are not satisfied by the more simple process of merely going away and leaving her. Divorce is easy in Japan. Surely she has been

disrespectful to you ; or has embroiled you with McKenzie and his wife, your friends ; or she has shown jealousy ; or—ah !” he went on suddenly, as though a bright idea occurred to him, “she has talked too much. She must surely have often wearied you with her dismal conversation.”

If a great sense of shame had not swept into Somerville's heart at the idea of these subterfuges for obtaining his freedom from the child-woman he no longer loved he must have laughed at Yumoto's relieved expression of countenance, and his suggestion that the poor little wife who had clung to him but a couple of hours ago in a paroxysm of grief could have spoken too much. The memory of her stumbling, halting efforts to talk to him smote him suddenly and painfully.

“No, she has done none of these things, O wise one,” he replied slowly ; “and the chain would be there though the links were legally snapped for so outrageously inadequate a reason.”

“You are too augustly punctilious,” said Yumoto, with a shrug of his shoulders. “You have married a Japanese woman, why not get rid of her in a Japanese manner ?”

But Somerville only shook his head.

“Very well,” continued the other after a pause, “there is only one other way. Leave her. Go back to England, and you will soon forget her and she you. She need not go back to Honjo.” (Somerville shuddered.) “But she can get another situation in one of the foreign restaurants ; and in

time she will marry again, my friend. She is sure to marry again, and then you will be free. It is all very simple, though not so much so as I would have made it. I will let you know the date of her remarriage. And I shall expect you," he continued, "to send me out some of those excellent cigars you give me when I come up to your house. The news will be worth five hundred of them, will it not?"

Somerville winced. He was perfectly well aware that he would in the end accept Yumoto's solution of the situation, namely, that he should return to England and abandon Mio-San. But his friend's perfectly sincere proposal that Mio-San should be divorced for some trumpery or imagined reason revolted his better feelings.

On his way down to the town he had tried to persuade himself that it was the terrible home hunger, which so often smites such a temperament as his in a foreign clime, that had seized him in so torturing a grip, and that there was no woman as the first cause of his sudden moral and temperamental upheaval. And because he was not altogether callous he had not succeeded. He had been endeavouring even as he sat there opposite Yumoto of the benign and inscrutable face to persuade himself that he would some day return, but the image of Violet Desborough and the look he had seen in her eyes when she welcomed him as he stepped on to the *Empress of China's* deck rudely brushed aside the fiction with which he had sought to quiet the stirrings of his better nature.

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He had not consulted McKenzie, for he knew he would have merely laughed in his cynical way, and exclaimed tersely, "Pay her well; take the next boat back to Europe; and if you fancy this Desborough girl, go in and win."

All delightfully simple, but to Somerville fraught with possibilities of remorse and self-condemnation which he dreaded to face.

"I am afraid you are but a broken reed, my usually so exceedingly wise and ingenious friend," Somerville said at length. "And I somehow fear Mio-San will take things less calmly and philosophically than you would have me believe. That's the rub. If I were only sure."

"I know women," said Yumoto, with a nod of his head; "they are all the same. They forget."

Somerville shook his head.

"My friend," continued Yumoto, ignoring Somerville's gesture of dissent, "you will adopt one or other of my solutions. Human nature in like case as yours always does. We men are cowards where women are concerned; we try and persuade ourselves that it is tenderness, sentiment; but we err; it is alight at tears and reproaches, and we dally over the operation of burning our boats as though we really wished to return to an object no longer possessed of our affections."

Somerville did not reply, but his face flushed, and he opened his lips as though about to speak.

Yumoto laughed outright, and continued, "When do you sail? The *Orient Queen* calls in ten days,

and it would be most excellent for you to go by her. You would be reminded of the woman you desire, and the image of her you have found no longer interesting would be correspondingly obliterated."

It all appeared so simple to Yumoto that his friend's reluctance seemed Quixotic and even foolish.

"Believe me," he continued, "it is the best thing to do. And if I can assist you to smooth matters with Mio-San I am at your service, my honourable friend. You will see that I am right and that you—augustly wise in Art and many other things though you are—will prove to be wrong. Mio-San will shed a few tears, perhaps, but then she will accept the honourable amount of tangible consolation your augustly good nature will prompt you to offer, and—forget. In a few months I shall be able to write and tell you of the husband or lover she has taken; and then, with all your Quixoticness, you will be glad that you took my advice. I know women," remarked Yumoto with an enigmatic smile, glancing out of the win low. "Their hearts are like those wonderful boxes Kizaki sells; there is always something further inside them than one thinks or at first discovers."

"I will think over what you have said," Somerville replied, after a moment's pause, "and in a day or two I will let you know."

Yumoto smiled. In his mind's eye he could already see the *Orient Queen* disappearing through

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the narrows between Ogami and Megami Points with Somerville on board, bound for England and the woman he desired.

"Very well," he remarked, "you are going to be a wise man. Very good. Let me know, and I will assist you to make a comfortable end to your affair with Mio-San. You will not need to pay her as much as you would have to do if she lived with her parents. That is good." And Yumoto nodded his head solemnly, for his was a mind that economised in all things, even in his affections.

Somerville rose. The conversation promised to become distasteful, and he had suffered enough from the fires of self-contempt during the interview already.

"I must be going," he said, extending his hand to Yumoto; "I have to call at Hoshin's for a piece of lacquer he has been repairing, and there is also a sketch to be got off by the next mail for a man in Paris. Good-bye. Come up and have a smoke soon."

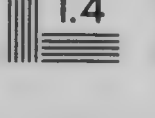
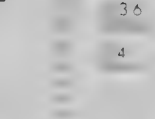
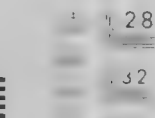
"*Sayonara*," rejoined Yumoto, taking his hand. "Do not worry. It is so simple a matter, this affair of yours. She can have no grievance, for you are going away. You are not about to instal a rival."

When he got outside in the sunshine of the Bund Somerville felt he had escaped from an ordeal of his own seeking which had proved him and found him wanting. He was vexed that he could not feel more indescribably mean than he did. But his regrets were all lest he should hurt one who had never



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done him any injury, and not because of the defection of his love. The mere idea of going home caused the sunlight to appear of yet more exquisite radiance, the air less enervatingly hot. He was going home, and at the end of the journey there was Violet Desborough.

As he walked along the quay and, turning inland, made his way through a shady by-street towards Funadaiku-machi he did not give a thought to what the latter would say to him. By a strange development of ideas he forgot the fact that it might be impossible to prevent the existence of Mio-San from coming to her knowledge. He only remembered the look of greeting in her eyes, and her half-playful, half-serious chiding that he had never after all come to Tokio.

Hoshin, who besides being a dealer in curios was a metal-worker of great skill, was sitting cross-legged at the back of his shop tapping a piece of lacquer on a strange little bench about ten inches high with a toy-like mallet, when Somerville's shadow darkened the door. He glanced up at once, and his bright, slit-like eyes, which always seemed on the blink because of their near-sightedness, opened a little wider in welcome to his visitor.

"*Kon nichi wa. Irasshaimashi!*" he exclaimed, without getting up. "Your honourable piece of work is done. Much trouble, many hours. Afraid you think much dear, sir," he remarked, drawing the small lacquer box from the drawer of a cabinet close at hand.

Somerville came into the shop and took the article from Hoshin. The work was beautifully done. Any but a Japanese workman would have failed to have disguised the crack which had spoiled the beauty of the design of dolphins and turtles which in a sea of inlaid nacre sported on the lid. Now it was impossible to discover the flaw unless one looked for it on the inside.

"It is good. *Kekko!*" exclaimed Somerville, when he had examined it. "You are a wonderful man, Hoshin San."

"No, no," replied the old man with comical humility. "I am a miserable workman."

But his eyes gleamed with satisfaction at the Englishman's praise.

"How much?" asked Somerville, pulling out a handful of coin, and glancing down at the piece of metal work with which Hoshin was employing his time during the interval of customers.

"It is abominably much," said the old man. "Thirty sen, most augustly deigning to be pleased one."

Somerville smiled and dropped the money with a rattle into the tiny brass bowl which served Hoshin—when he was himself there to guard it—as a till. The sound of the money's chink and of Somerville's voice must have penetrated to the back of the dark little shop, for the *fusama* was slid back and Haru San, smiling and wrinkled, appeared.

After the usual obeisance she exclaimed, "It is a long time since I have hung upon your honourable

eyelids. Please to make your honourable self at home in this our wretched place." Which meant nothing more terrible, Somerville knew, than "It is a long while since you were last here. Please be seated."

After he had suitably replied came the inevitable inquiry after the health of Mio-San, and whether he were still satisfied with her. He tried to fence with the question for a moment or two, and then he said, with as casual an air as he could bring himself to assume—

"I am thinking of returning to England soon—for a time."

"*Naru hodo!*" both exclaimed in a breath.

Then Haru San inquired what was to become of madame the honourable lady of his house, and asked whether he would divorce her.

Even in the dim light of the shop Somerville felt his cheeks burn at these inquiries. But he need not have troubled himself, for to both Hoshin and Haru San (used to foreign marriages and their inevitable and foreseen ends) his departure and abandonment of the *musumé* he had seen fit to marry with such unnecessary trouble to his august condescension was the most natural thing in the world.

"Ah!" exclaimed Haru San, as she found he had no very definite plans, and with a recollection of the "excellently many yen" Mio-San's former stay beneath their roof had produced, "should she need a dwelling whilst your august honourableness is away, what better one than here?"

Hoshin shook his head in deprecation of the idea, but Haru San was not to be put off.

"She will be quite happy," she continued, "and I will see that no one marries her during your honourable absence. Ah! but it was truly an august condescension for you to marry the miserable girl. And should you not return" (Somerville thought that he saw Haru San smile somewhat sardonically, even though the light was so dim) "she would willingly become a widow and be grateful to you for the many fine gifts she has received from you, her lord."

Whilst Haru San was speaking an idea had presented itself to his mind. It would not appear so heartless a desertion if she were left with people she knew. But he must think the matter over. Some even better solution of the problem might eventually suggest itself.

"You are marvellously kind and condescending," he replied, "and your wish is a good one. I will think of what you have said to me, but I have much to do, and must not give myself the honour to remain talking here longer."

When he had left the shop and disappeared along the street Haru San promptly sat down beside her lord, who had recommenced the tapping of the metal plate with his tiny hammer, and set to work calculating how much she might reasonably ask of the wealthy Englishman for taking care of the wife of whom she felt sure he had tired.

"Tap, ting, tap" went Hoshin's tiny hammer

with just the noise a woman's pipe makes when hit sharply against the smoking-box to rid it of its ash, and every tap counted a yen in the ears of Haru San till her head grew dizzy with the wealth she imagined to be flowing in.

And meantime Somerville had faced towards home and Mio-San, and was trying to imagine what he should say.



CHAPTER XVII

THE TRAGEDY OF A DYING LOVE—BOUND WEST



ON the night following Somerville's visit to Yumoto's office Mio-San learned that he was about to leave her. When he told her they were upon the verandah looking silently at the brilliantly lit town below. He broke the news with a man's clumsy attempt at gentleness and a circumlocution of phrase which prevented her from at first comprehending the true meaning of his words. But when she realised it she sank like a stricken child on to the floor, and clasped him round the knees, whilst she poured out a torrent of endearing words that shook him more than a thousand reproaches could have done. In vain he had tried to calm her and to persuade her that he would return.

Some inexplicable instinct told her that for her there would be no more days with him, no sunshine, no spring—that the words of Katakuri San her enemy had come true. And then, when he stooped and raised her in his arms, she clung to him with a tenacity which crushed her frail body against his own strong one till she could have moaned with the pain of it. And then she whispered the secret joy that she held in her heart, and watched his face to see the change of purpose which she thought must surely come. But alas! it came not, the face that looked into hers flushed and then paled, but the look in the eyes was unchanged, and she knew he would go.

During the days which followed Mio-San went about with so heavy a heart that she could make no response to his attempts at cheerfulness—could scarcely seek to charm him in the old way with her naïve affection, her quaint conceits, and equally quaint efforts to learn the language that he spoke. To her the sun seemed to have for ever set, the light to have faded out of her life, the fragrant flowers in their exquisite garden to have suddenly lost their perfume and died.

The *Orient Queen* had come and gone, for Somerville had found it impossible after all to take his passage by her. Another boat would call at Nagasaki in about three weeks, and he hurried on his arrangements so that he might leave by her.

Mio-San watched the gradual dismantlement of

the home with an aching heart. Shi-wono with a loudly expressed regret, for she had been treated very liberally by this eccentric Englishman who had put himself to such unnecessary trouble by marrying a *musumé* who had taken his fancy; and now, unless another foreigner would be equally complacent, she would have to return to the hotel and work harder for less pay.

During these last days Somerville alternately despised himself and excused himself. At times the call of his own land and race was so strong in his blood that the latter was quite easy. And then he would catch sight of Mio-San's little grief-stricken face—which gave the lie to Yumoto's loud assertions that *musumé* were butterflies, incapable of deep or lasting feeling—and the old self-disdain would assail him afresh.

When packing his sketches and pictures in the studio he had made one last attempt at deception. He had given into Mio-San's care several of the largest pictures he had painted of her. "Keep them till I return, which I shall do some day," he said. But she looked at him with large, tear-dulled, unresponsive eyes in which he could read her disbelief. In her heart there was always that terrible answering note, "He will not return."

So she shook her head sadly, and murmured under her breath the words which had often pleased him in the past, "*Anata bakari san*" ("Thou art the only one august one"). For her there could be no other.

She knew that she was to return to the care of Hoshin and Haru San, and she had accepted the arrangement without comment.

"What could it matter?" she asked herself over and over again, now that her lord who had once looked upon her with augustly deigning favour was about to depart.

The last boxes were packed in the fading glimmer of the beautiful September twilight. The house was bare except for the merest necessities of the few remaining hours, and the scanty fixtures which Somerville had found when he came to it. McKenzie and Yumoto had both been up; but the atmosphere of departure and of Mio-San's uncontrollable grief did not invite a long stay.

At the gate, after Yumoto had strolled away out of earshot, McKenzie had disconcerted Somerville more than he realised by one brief, terse comment upon the situation. "By Jove, old fellow," he had exclaimed as his hand rested upon the gate, "I believe she loves you."

His friend had started as though struck by a whip, and had turned away without another word.

Mio-San awaited him on the verandah when he returned slowly and thoughtfully up the garden path.

By some inspiration she had become possessed of the desire to be the Mio-San of old for the last time. Something urged her to leave in his memory only the fragrance of her when they both first came to the home which was now stripped of all its charm



As he climbed the steps between her hands she bent forward and took his face and kissed it. Page 250

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As he climbed the steps his face, with its unwonted pallor, still bore traces of the blow McKenzie's words had struck him, and she leant forward and took it between her hands, as she had used to do when greeting him on his return from the town, and kissed it. And then she smoothed back the wisps of hair which the night breeze had blown low on his forehead.

"Thou art still my lord, oh, my beloved one, whose eyes are to me like deep pools of quiet water, and whose smile is like sunshine indescribable, though I no longer find favour in thy eyes, and am about to see thee no more," she whispered as softly and tenderly as aforetime.

Into the man's heart for a moment's space of time came once again the answering note, and he drew her to him. But she was not deceived. It was but the last glimmering flicker upon the altar of love they had worshipped at. And it died down again; though for the remainder of the evening he was more tender towards her than he had been for weeks. But Mio-San had won a tiny, if a Pyrrhic, victory, for he remembered both the words and her caress for long afterwards.

But the gloom of their dismantled and about-to-be-abandoned home was heavy upon them, and not even the exquisite beauty of the night could lift it. The harsh and unmusical voice of Shi-wono crooning a lament over the departure on the morrow of her "much generous, augustly honourable master," provided an additional touch of melancholy as it

reached them from the kitchen at the back of the house.

"The end ! The end ! What an end !" the man kept thinking to himself. And the woman ? She could not even think for the dull aching of her heart, and the overpowering sense of desolation which overwhelmed her.

She sat watching the man she had called her lord, and from whom she had felt herself drifting for weeks before the crisis came, with sadly observant eyes ; storing her memory with pictures of him for use in the blank loneliness of days to come. She watched every movement as he walked slowly about the room or stooped to pack some almost-forgotten trifle in the one box still to be fastened down. At last everything was finished, and the room in which they had spent so many of the happy hours of the first few weeks after their marriage was stripped as bare, except for a litter of paper and torn-up letters, as the day on which Somerville first saw it. Her own things had been packed in curious native-made cases a day or two before, and the open doors of the *fukuro dana* showed empty gaping cavities in the wall. On the morrow coolies would come and carry her boxes to Hoshin's house, where she had learned without emotion that she was to stay.

At last Somerville yawned with fatigue and the heat of the summer's night, and then began and continued for a while the melancholy screeching of the *amado* pulled along hastily in their grooves as he shut up the house for the night.

Early next morning, whilst the dew sparkled upon the few unfaded lotus blossoms in the pond at the bottom of the garden, the *djins* with their superannuated *jinrikishas*, now used for conveyance of parcels and luggage, arrived at the gate of the path leading from the upper road down to the back of the house, and a few minutes later the strong-limbed fellows descended and took possession of the house. There were six of them, and, laden with boxes and small cases, they made their way swiftly through the wood, and in half an hour were well on their way down the rough, stone-encumbered road to the town.

As Somerville and Mio-San gazed out for the last time from the verandah at the sunlit town below them and the breeze-ruffled water of the harbour a great sadness possessed them both. But for Somerville there was, however, the hope of the future—a hope he could not have stifled even had he wished. For the little being at his side there was the utter blankness and desolation of nothingness. Love's fragile chains of charm and freshness had not served to preserve her from disaster. Shi-wono had that morning, in not altogether disinterested sympathy, assured her that Somerville would return. But she had loved him with the love that women of another race might perhaps only have given to some god, and she knew that there would be no reunion of the frayed bond which had once bound her to him.

"Come," said Somerville at length, touching her arm.

Mio-San gave a slight shudder, one more lingering, comprehensive glance at the home she was about to leave, which had been thrown open as usual so that she could see into all the rooms which were along the verandah, and then, with Shi-wono's oft-repeated "*Sayonara*" in her ears, she descended the verandah steps into the sunshine.

Ere they turned the corner of the path Somerville threw a glance back at the house; but Mio-San, whose face was very white and pinched by grief, kept hers steadily towards the harbour. She had seen the last of the home whilst still a part of it. She would not glance back at the empty, soulless thing. Somerville closed the wicket with elaborate care.

On their way down the hillside to the town they spoke but little.

To Mio-San the sunlight which environed them seemed a mere mockery of the misery which possessed her heart. Once or twice Somerville spoke with a feeble attempt at cheerfulness, but in her anguish the knowledge of all the strange foreign words she had so laboriously learned that she might converse with him in his own tongue seemed to have suddenly deserted her, leaving her painfully agitated mind a hideous blank, incapable of comprehending all he said or of answering him.

Through the long, narrow streets they wended their way, seeing little or nothing of the quaintly grotesque house-fronts grimed by dust and baked by sunshine, at which formerly Somerville was

never tired of gazing. Those of the shopkeepers, craftsmen at work in the dim recesses of their small open-fronted dwellings, who looked up when they passed, regarded Mio-San's grief-stricken face and Somerville's gloomy one with wonder. A woman or two came nearer the true underlying tragedy of these two passers-by; but they unwittingly libelled Mio-San in thinking her a *yujo* about to be discarded instead of a wife about to be deserted.

At last they reached Hoshin's to find Haru San already engaged in stowing away her expected guest's boxes. She welcomed Mio-San with a profusion of salutations and elaborate phrases, and then led the way into the little room at the back of the house overlooking the tiny garden.

There were practically no arrangements to discuss, for everything had already been settled by Somerville; and so she left them alone together after reiterated assurances of all the happiness and comfort Mio-San would enjoy under her hospitable (but she said, out of politeness, "execrable") roof.

The sound of a deep booming siren aboard a steamer cleft the sunlight and re-echoed amongst the surrounding hills, causing Somerville to start and Mio-San to shiver. It seemed the signal for departure—the end of the tiny tragedy of the past few weeks.

Somerville commenced to speak some halting words of farewell, for he had decided that there should be no distressing, embarrassing public one either on board the mailboat or on the *hatoôa*. He

feared Mio-San's outbursts of grief and perhaps even reproaches ; and there would not be a man amongst his friends and acquaintances who would not consider him a fool for exposing himself to either, for in their eyes at least Mio-San was a native woman, to be taken up and dropped as the mood of her possessor dictated.

"You will be happy," he said lamely, "I have seen to that. Hoshin and Haru San will see that you want for nothing, and the time will not be long. I shall return."

But Mio-San, who had fallen at his feet in a paroxysm of grief, in an abandonment of entreaty which at another time would have disgusted his sense of woman's reticence, cried out with her heart full of the knowledge that there would never be a return. "My lord, my augustly shining one, the one whom I worship, what is it that I have done which has found such disfavour in your all-seeing eyes? Why have I no longer favour in your eyes? Why have I become as a most despicable thing that you desire nevermore to gaze upon? My lord, do not leave me. Remember what I have told you. Do not turn the joy, which was in my heart at the thought of the coming blessing from the gods, into utter darkness—the darkness of the night when the light of moon and stars is hidden and the dry earth trembles."

"Hush!" said he gently, but not seeking to raise her. "I must go. The land of my ancestors calls to me across the sea. There is in my heart the

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desire which comes to many who hear the note of the *hototogisu* when they are far from home. You need have no fear of want, no anxiety for the future, and if you should need aught that I have not provided go and speak with Yumoto San, and he will see that the thing you desire is done."

Mio-San replied not a word, but clung to him weeping. What was all he had prepared to her? In a dim way she realised that the gulf which lay between them of race and spirit and mind had blinded him so that he could not see that she would have bartered all these future things, of which he spoke to her, willingly for one hour of his love that used to be.

In his man's stupidity he thought that he had at length satisfied and convinced her because she said no more, and so he stooped and with firm but gentle fingers unclasped her own from him. Then he stooped still lower, and kissed her once as she swayed upon her knees.

"*Sayonara, Mio! Sayonara!*" and he was gone.

Then from that dimly-lit room behind the shop of Hoshin went up an exceeding bitter cry of "My lord, my augustly beautiful one!"

So bitter, indeed, that Haru San came running in, not stopping to say even "*Sayonara!*" to the Englishman who was about to depart.

Outstretched upon the spotless matting covering the floor lay Mio-San like some gay-plumaged, wounded bird, with a face from which every vestige of colour had fled, leaving it an ashen, pitiful grey.

In one hand was clasped unknowingly the bundle of *satsu* (paper-money) which Somerville had thrust there as he loosed her grasp. Of these Haru San took charge.

Outside in the sunlight Somerville hurried along with Mio-San's cry, which had pierced the *fusama* though he had closed it behind him, in his ears, and the uncomfortable feeling that he had committed a crime troubling his heart.

Only an hour or two remained ere the *Morning Calm* would be casting off her moorings and heading for the open sea.

He found all his luggage on the *haloba* near Yumoto's office, and McKenzie, Folkard, and Yumoto himself on guard near it.

"It is over?" queried the latter, as Somerville came up to the group.

Somerville nodded, and added, "Thank God. But you are wrong, Yumoto, my friend; she cares, and I am a brute."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed McKenzie and Yumoto together. And then the former added reassuringly, "A *musumé* is like a butterfly. In a few weeks—no offence, old man—she will have forgotten, or the memory will only be that of an episode in her existence."

Folkard said nothing. He had only been out a few months longer than Somerville himself, and he had a mother and sisters at home, and ideas concerning even native women which were not much in vogue amongst the older settlers.

Meanwhile Somerville's luggage had been got into a coffin-like *sampan* by the coolies, and was ready to go aboard.

A little desultory conversation of the sort that prevails at the departure of a chum, a string of messages for old friends and acquaintances at home, and the time came for Somerville to follow his luggage, which was already alongside the mail-boat.

"Goodbye, old chap. Pleasant voyage and company," said McKenzie, wringing his hand. "Perhaps you will after all come out again."

"Goodbye," from Folkard with a handshake.

"*Sayonara!*" from Yumoto.

And then Somerville turned away. But just as he was about to step into the *sampan* he called Yumoto to him.

"You will not forget to write," he said. "And if you hear that she is unhappy, or is falling into the mire—save her, and cable to me."

"I will not forget," replied Yumoto, with a scarcely concealed smile at what he considered his friend's unnecessary punctiliousness. "I shall not forget. My memory is as good as that of a Chinese moneylender."

An hour later and the huge bulk of the *Morning Calm* throbbed her way at half-speed through the narrow waters between Ogami and Megami Points and thence past the tree-crowned Pappenberg out into the immensity of the open grey sea.

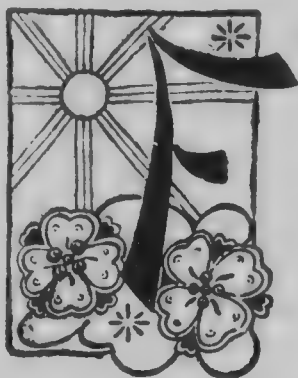
Somerville stood on deck to see the last of the

green hills and town; but he knew nothing of the eyes of Mio-San, who, with protesting Haru San, had climbed to a turn in the road which led up to McKenzie's villa to see the great *jokisen's* going.



CHAPTER XVIII

YUMOTO TAKES A HAND IN THE GAME—
UNTO HER OWN PEOPLE



OR the first few days after Somerville's departure Mio-San's grief was inconsolable. Haru San's well-meant efforts to comfort her were quite unavailing, for they consisted chiefly of long-winded exhortations framed to show her sad little guest how grateful she ought to be that her

honourable departed lord had been so kind to her whilst she lived with him, and so generous when Fate destined that they should part company. Then Haru San, finding that in Mio-San she had different material to deal with than that to which she was accustomed, namely, her nieces, who had without much waste of sentiment contracted several profitable though transient marriages, altered her tactics. She commenced to assure Mio-San that if she were

only patient her august husband would return from across the sea.

Something at first told Mio-San that this would never be, notwithstanding Somerville's own parting protestations and Haru San's sophistries. But she was a woman, lonely in her great grief, and she wished for the comfort that such a belief would bring her aching heart. And so it was that at last she began, almost insensibly at first, to have faith in the word of him who had left her, even though she had known that love was dead.

Several circumstances, too, assisted her willing mind to this. The first mailboat which arrived from Hong-kong after Somerville's departure brought with it one Hilary Petherton, who had gone home a year before, leaving behind him the pretty *geisha* who had two years previously captivated his senses at one of the most popular of the tea-houses in O-Suwa Park, and had been installed as his house-keeper. And now, although the house above the foreign settlement was a different one, O Hagi San was again happy in it with her returned lover.

This fact soon became noised abroad, and in time reached the ears of Hoshin and his wife, and the latter went joyfully to Mio-San, who sat in the garden thinking, as she so often did, of him who had gone, to tell her the news. "And," she added after she had done so, "why, O not less beautiful one, should not thy husband also return according to his august and condescending word given you at his departure?"

Then there was the coming child—his child and hers—that the augustly deigning gods had in their wonderful goodness vouchsafed to her. Till she had begun to recognise that Somerville's love for her had waned this had been an unspeakable joy. And now in her forsaken heart there grew up day by day an increasing hope that her beloved lord would in his goodness at least return to see his child.

It was several weeks after her coming to Hoshin's before she saw anything of Yumoto or McKenzie. One day at sunset she had wandered through the native town to the shore of the harbour, as she often did, to look upon the waters which had borne Somerville away from her, and was returning along one of the main streets, when she saw Yumoto coming towards her.

When he caught sight of her he hastened to greet her, regarding her face with curiosity, for he had often wondered how long her grief and enforced widowhood would last.

"*Kon ban wa!*" he exclaimed. "I trust that your augustness is quite well."

Mio-San smiled rather sadly and assured him that she was well.

"And happy?" he queried pointedly.

"No! For is not my beloved, augustly deigning husband far from me across the dark waters; and do not my unworthy eyes ache like the sleep-weary eyes of a sick child for the sight of him?"

"But he will return," said Yumoto. Not because

he believed it, but because Mio-San looked so weary and wan. "He will return if you are but patient."

Mio-San felt a lump rising in her throat. Even if Haru San, Hoshin, and Somerville himself wished to deceive her, why should this man who would not care whether she were sad or gay, happy or miserable?

"I cannot believe that he will," she replied after a pause for thought. "If he had cared, if I still found favour either because of my most contemptible body or face in his eyes, he would not have gone away in the great *jokisen*. No! no! the joy is not given to me that I should again behold him and feast my eyes upon his face."

"Let us walk along," said Yumoto, "and I will tell you. You do not understand. His people were calling for him; he had business with the men of his race. When it is accomplished he will return again. Have you then not heard that the lover of O Hagi San is with her once more? And you"—the speaker paused, almost surprised at his own eloquence in the cause of consolation which could bring him no advantage—"are more beautiful than she. Your eyes are more like the stars which look down upon the white brow of Fuji on a frosty night; your skin is almost as white as the women of his own race, and your mouth can smile like the red lily in the sunshine. Cannot your heart trust his return?"

Mio-San would have been more than a human

woman had Yumoto's words not caused the blood to surge beneath her skin and her eyes to regain a little of their old sparkle. What the wise Yumoto San says must be right, she thought. Did not my honourable lord once tell McKenzie San that Yumoto San had all the wisdom of the wise men of the East; and did not McKenzie say yes, even the wisdom of the honourable Devil himself?

In her heart began to grow the belief that Somerville would return as she listened to Yumoto's words, and drank in the arguments he used. As they walked along Funadaiku-machi and approached Hoshin's dwelling she did not even notice that it was dark, and that in the open shops and outside them the owners were lighting their lamps and lanterns. In her heart was a glint of the sunshine of hope, and though she was weary she walked at Yumoto's side without faltering, her lacquered *geta* ringing sharply on the paving of the street.

When they parted at Hoshin's door she gave Yumoto her hand in the English fashion, for she had long ago discovered that nothing pleased him better than a tribute to his European education, and said with a simplicity that was strangely winning—

"O Yumoto San, you have caused the sunshine to come again into my heart, and to-morrow the flowers will bloom again for me, and I shall know that the birds sing. *Sayonara*. Perhaps my lord will after many moons return. *Gokuro sama*."

"*Sayonara*, O Mio-San," replied Yumoto.

And then he watched her enter Hoshin's dwelling

ere he turned to make his way to the Restaurant of the Many Cherry Trees, where he was to dine with McKenzie.

"I am a vastly great liar," he remarked to himself, as he hurried along, "for Somerville will not return. But it was worth many lies to see the flush come again into Mio-San's cheeks and the light kindle in those eyes of hers. Beautiful eyes," he continued, "which might make a man forget everything except that he was a man."

The hope that had been sown in Mio-San's heart grew under the fostering care of Haru San. Sometimes the latter, when she remembered the case of O Hagi San, really began to believe in what she said relating to the certainty of the august Somerville returning. Her powers of reasoning were not great, and it seemed natural enough to her that the "foreign wealthy augustnesses" should all behave alike. Hoshin shook his head, but said nothing, when he had heard her and her guest discussing the matter. He had lived far longer than Haru San, and had seen many men come and go never to return since the foreigner had been permitted to dwell in Nagasaki.

The weeks went by, and many times Mio-San had taken a *jinrikisha* ride round the harbour to a little plateau above the fishermen's landing-place and opposite the Pappenberg, where she had sat dreaming of the day when perhaps one of the great *jokisen* which seemed to climb up out of the distant sea might be bringing her lord back to

her. Sometimes a great and overpowering sadness would enshroud her, and the terrible question presented itself to her mind, Would she be there to meet him? Then the sigh of the wind in the trees seemed to say, "*Iye! Iye! Iye!*" ("No! No! No!") And she would feel afraid of the dark blankness which loomed in the future. But when the sun shone on the green summit of the isle, which looked like a jewelled boss set in a burnished shield, and the ripples of the tide as it swept through the Megami Channel sang, "*Saiyo! Saiyo! Saiyo!*" ("Yes! Yes! Yes!") she was glad.

When three months had passed and no letter came, her heart began to fail.

It was too cold for her to go to her look-out under the pine, and in the gloom of Hoshin's shop she passed her time watching him at his work, the sharp tap-tap-ting-ting of his little mallets and tools sometimes becoming so unbearable to her vibrating nerves that she fled from the sound, even though it meant the dreary solitude of the little bare room which had been by Somerville's wish given up to her.

Here she could at least think of him and wonder vaguely if he would come, and do so in time to welcome their child.

One day at the end of January Yumoto's clerk came with a letter which the former had translated into Japanese. It was from Somerville to tell her that he was well, and that he was doing the business for which he had returned to England.

It conveyed little idea to her mind save that he must be at work painting some of those marvellous pictures which had been such an eternal source of wonderment to her. But she understood the end. "Little Mio-San," he said, only Yumoto had embellished the phraseology with a marvellous elaboration of polite sentiment, "you must be patient." Then followed some instructions telling her that in the event of her requiring money she was to apply to Yumoto, and that was all.

"She must be patient." She understood that. What, indeed, had she been during the last four weary months but patient? In all her weariness and distress of mind and body she had been that, hoping for a very simple reward.

By the same mail Yumoto himself received a letter from Somerville which made it clear to his Oriental intelligence that Mio-San was as truly widowed as though she were either divorced or Somerville dead. He had never really believed in the fiction of the latter's return. Nor did, indeed, his desertion of her strike him as in the least reprehensible. It was merely the natural end to a foreigner's alliance with a *musumé*.

As he had sat in his office perusing his friend's letter he thought over the whole situation. He liked Somerville and he also in a condescending way liked Mio-San. He was sorry for her in precisely the way that a man holding his views upon the subject of women would be. He even began to wonder whether it would not be a wise and

politic course to try to communicate with her father, the florist, at Ureshino. Mio-San once more with her own people would probably in course of time forget her present grief at the loss of her foreign husband, and might soon marry again. He knew her short-lived marriage with Somerville would prove no bar, as she was left with what must to a man of the class she might possibly marry appear a large amount of money. Besides, he knew Somerville was not a mean man, and that he had only to suggest it to him and Mio-San would be provided with a dowry which would be exceedingly tempting to many. Had she been divorced for not cooking rice properly, for ill-temper, or for one of the other trivial but possible reasons it would have been a different matter.

At the back of Yumoto's mind, too, was the idea that Somerville would be grateful to him for the carrying out of any scheme which would tend towards Mio-San's happiness and oblivion of the past.

So it happened that when writing to a tea-planter who had some fields near Ureshino, he mentioned the fact of Mio-San having left the house to which she had gone as maid, her subsequent marriage with a foreigner, her present residence with Hoshir, and that her honourable lord and master when he had left her treated her very handsomely.

Kan-zan, the tea-planter, delighted to have such news to import, hied to Okada, the father of Mio-San, and told him what he had heard from his

excellent merchant friend, O Yumoto San, of the Bund, Nagasaki.

A few days passed ere Okada decided to go to Nagasaki and find his daughter, for there had been frosts, and he could not tear himself away from his beloved flowers, which needed all the attention and care he could devote to them. But just as night was closing in, about ten days after Mio-San had received the letter from Somerville, she heard her father's voice addressing Hoshin in the shop outside asking if she dwelt with them.

Then, as she listened intently, she heard Hoshin's reply, and afterwards Haru San explaining how it was that she was living with them. Then their voices fell, and she could only catch a word here and there amid an undertone of conversation which was like the droning of bees.

She waited and listened intently, and after a while she heard the sound of footsteps on the floor of the shop, and a moment later the *fusama* was pushed aside, and her father entered the room in which she was.

She would have made the humblest obeisance of welcome, but he stepped forward and checked her.

Okada had always been a good father to her; in him was developed to an unusual degree the love of children. And when he had heard his daughter's story from Haru San, he had wondered much at the conduct of the foreigner who could desert her now that a child was to be born. But for that unborn child Somerville's abandonment—as he had pro-

vided for her well and generously—would have scarcely caused him to speculate or wonder at all.

The greeting between them would have struck a European as cold and formal. There was no embracing, no kiss, no hand-clasp even; though Mio-San would have given both the latter, the significance of which she had learned of her English husband. But when she stretched out her hand, her eyes full of tears, her father thought that it was merely that he might assist her to rise to her feet. And as he did so Mio-San knew that his love for her still lived.

Then when he had looked at her, and with gentle hands, though the skin of them was rough from the tending of his beloved flowers, brushed away the shining drops which sparkled in the light of the lantern hanging from the cross-beam of the ceiling, he told her that he had come to fetch her home, that her mother was looking for her, that Ko-sho, her brother, and So-ji, her sister, had not forgotten her, and that on the morrow she would see them.

In her joy at the prospect of home, of once more hearing the music of the river flowing by her father's beautiful garden, of seeing the little brother she had played with and carried on her back, of being amid familiar scenes, she forgot that at Ureshino she could no longer watch for the ships climbing up out of the southern sea. But had she done so it would have been but sadness to her, not a remaining where she was. Her father had said she was to depart with him, and his will could not be gainsaid.

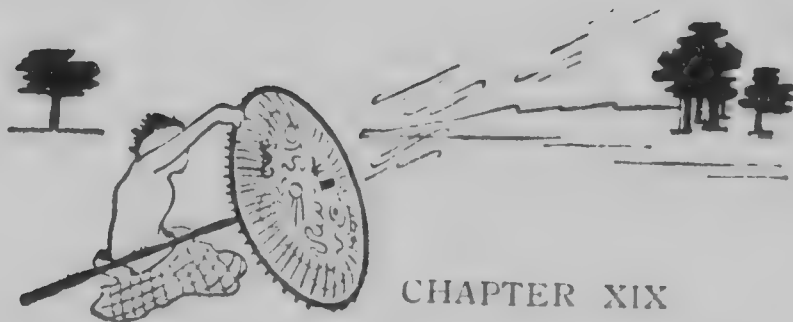
She looked up into his face with the rapture of a child weary by long absence, with a smile such as Somerville had always been able to call into being by the merest show of tenderness or kindness. And then she said, "Most august parent, I will gladly go with you so that my eyes may look upon my honourable mother's face once more. I will be ready at the hour you appoint."

Then Haru San and Hoshin came in, for there would have to be a reckoning with Okada. Haru San had never told Mio-San of the amount of the roll of *satsu* which she had found clasped in her hand the night she had swooned after Somerville had left. She was a woman kind of heart, but possessed of a love of the bright yen, and the *satsu* which made a pleasant rustling when held in the fingers tightly; but because of her kind heart the reckoning she presented was not so inaccurate as her inbred cupidity would fain have made it.

When he found how generous her august foreign husband had been, and what fine garments Mio-San possessed, Okada suddenly thought of his friend, the proprietor of the inn which stood on the bank of the river to whom Mio-San had been informally betrothed before she left the village for Nagasaki. Perhaps Yoshida would still be willing to marry her when he was told that she could bring him in her hands nearly five hundred dollars, and many a fine *kimono*, which would add to her attractiveness when attending to the comfort of his guests. But Okada was a wise man, and he said

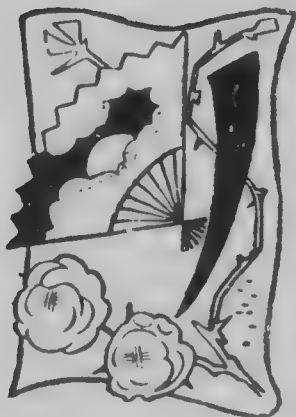
nothing of his thoughts concerning this other marriage, and in the morning Mio-San and he set out for Ureshino in *jinrikishas*, for which the former paid.

As they passed over the crest of the hill on the Ureshino road Mio-San threw one last, lingering look at the town and the little house on the hillside, once hers, which now appeared in the distance amid the trees, environing it like a tiny *châlet*, and then her eyes travelled out over the harbour to the gap between the hills through which the *jokisen* would come. Then a moment or two later it was gone, and she hid her face in the wide sleeves of her *kimono*, whilst her little body shook with the anguish of her sobs.



CHAPTER XIX

THE TANGLED WEB OF HUMAN CIRCUMSTANCE



It was a raw December day when Somerville reached London, and the dreary squalor of the metropolis chilled him to the bone. On the voyage home he had had time for thought—time to think out his future plans and to come to many conclusions.

Once or twice a disgust with himself had well-nigh overwhelmed him for a time, and he had almost determined to have got off the *Morning Calm* at Aden, and have awaited the next boat bound East. But the image of Mio-San, which so troubled him at first, became fainter and fainter, and that of Violet Desborough more clear. He even began to tell himself—what his friends Yumoto and McKenzie and other men out there would have undoubtedly done—that his mistake had been to

marry. He had given to Mio-San what in his truer moments he called "rights," which she did not expect, and which every one in the foreign settlement would have considered a Quixotic gift on his part.

The woman he loved was of his own race; the woman he had taken to wife was not. In the haste of his departure from Nagasaki, in the intense longing for the woman he was pursuing half round the world, which had been engendered by his daily life of non-communion of thought and ideas with the woman he had left behind, there had been no time, or he had forgotten to consider in what light it was probable the woman he loved would regard the events of the last six months. When he set his foot in London he was face to face with the problem.

He took his luggage to one of the Embankment hotels, which after Nagasaki houses and Quartier Latin studios seemed perilously vast, and then wired to an artist friend who had a flat and a studio at Chelsea. "If only Jefferson will give me house-room till I've had time to look round," he thought, "as he wrote the message, I shall worry out some solution of the muddle I'm in."

In a couple of hours the reply reached him. It was very brief, for Jefferson was an economist with words, though—critics were wont to assert—a prodigal with paint. "Delighted. Shall expect you this afternoon. Bring your baggage. Have plenty of room."

Just as dusk was falling and blotting out the river with a curtain of smoke-grey mist Somerville's cab drew up at Velasquez Mansions, the huge block of flats-cum-studios in which Rodney Jefferson dwelt. One had to be a successful artist to live there, for all the modern improvements which cute speculators and up-to-date architects saw fit to embody were to be found in Velasquez Mansions, and rents were proportionately high.

Jefferson's flat was situated on the fourth floor, because of the additional light, and the fact that the studio by an ingenious arrangement of the architect was placed on the top of a portion of the back outbuildings. With a lift going from six till twelve-thirty, as Jefferson often explained, height didn't much matter.

The two men had been fellow Art students in Paris, entering Colorossi's as "*nouveaux*" the same month; and although Rodney Jefferson after a three years' residence in the Quartier had returned to London, whilst Somerville had remained behind, they had kept up a more regular correspondence afterwards than most fellow-students do.

Jefferson had a factotum in the shape of an Army Reserve man, who opened the door to Somerville; but his master was close at his heels as his visitor entered the little cream-toned lobby of the flat.

"My dear old chap," said Jefferson, shaking hands warmly, "I'm real glad to see you. When I got your wire I thought how good it was of you to take me at my word when the opportunity served.

Come in. Aston, take Mr. Somerville's traps into the spare room, and see there's everything he'll want."

The man saluted, and with "I understand, sir," disappeared out of the door towards the lift.

"And now," exclaimed Jefferson, as he and Somerville entered the studio, "why are you here in London? I thought you were in Japan. By the way, only a week or ten days ago I made the acquaintance of a friend of yours at a dance Mrs. Odium Moschelles gave—a girl who went out on the same steamer as you, at least so she said. She told me she had seen you as they called at Nagasaki on their way home, and I little expected to find you turning up in London."

Somerville seated himself in one of the two deep easy-chairs which stood one on either side of the open hearth, and stretched out his limbs to the blaze. Before replying he gazed for a moment or two at the blue, red, and green flames that played hide and seek amongst the logs of ship's timbers which Jefferson always used because they burned with these same beautifully-coloured flames.

At last he said slowly, "I was in Japan, old fellow, two months or so ago. And now I am here."

"Precisely," exclaimed Jefferson, with a laugh; "but what has so suddenly brought you back from the land of the Chrysanthemum, the *geisha*, and the *musume*? I thought you wrote me from Nagasaki soon after you arrived and spoke of spending a year at least out there."

"So I did," admitted Somerville, with a trace of embarrassment, "but circumstances have occurred which have altered my plans."

"Which being interpreted," remarked his listener, "means a woman."

Somerville smiled and said, "I see, Jefferson, that your belief in woman as the first cause of most inexplicable things is still unshaken."

"It is made yet more firm," replied the other, laughing, "since it has been my fate to paint so many of them."

"Well, you're right," rejoined Somerville. And then he told something of those past months in Nagasaki and of Mio-San.

The two men sat over the fire, the one listening and the other telling a story which caused the listener every now and again to nod his head as though some pet idea of his own was receiving confirmation or he could have foreseen the end of things.

When Somerville got to a point in his story where the gulf first began to widen between him and Mio-San Jefferson ejaculated, "Poor little woman! poor little woman!" once or twice, but otherwise he made no audible comment till his friend had finished.

Then he said slowly, "I understand. And, Somerville, much as I pity the poor little woman, you were right to come away. Perhaps the unco' good might dissent from this opinion of mine. What matters? But you had run up against one of God

Almighty's problems, the racial one, which mortal men like ourselves only get broken in attempting to solve."

"I'm not sure I did right," rejoined Somerville, after a pause. "I wish I were. But I know that an indescribable longing for my own land, and for a woman or a friend who could understand me, could comprehend my aims, possessed me, and I had to come. But now, old fellow, I am in an *impasse* out of which I cannot see my way, and that's why I have taken you at your word and come here."

A sudden idea seemed to strike Jefferson as Somerville finished speaking, for he said, "Is there another woman? And is she in England?"

Somerville flushed, and for a moment he did not reply. And then he said, "Yes, to both questions."

Jefferson thought a moment, and then he said, "Ah! but what about the Japanese girl?"

It was not that under ordinary circumstances he would have regarded Somerville's entanglement any more seriously than McKenzie or Yumoto had done, but the appearance before the Consul at once lent a solemnity to the affair which put it on rather a different plane.

Somerville said nothing in reply to his friend's last question, and so the latter continued—

"You were always a kind-hearted chap," he remarked, "and you are possibly about to pay the penalty for something which you yourself have told me all your friends out there regarded as

pure Quixotism. I had an idea," he went on after a slight pause, "that you could divorce a Japanese woman pretty easily. Is that so?"

Somerville smiled rather grimly, and replied, "For almost anything. She has only got to talk too much, to estrange her husband's friends by her jealousy or backbiting, or"—and he laughed harshly—"not to cook properly. But Mio-San did none of these things, and in addition there is no doubt that ours was a legal marriage. At least, I don't think there is any. And now——"

He paused. And Jefferson struck in, "The chains have commenced to gall. Poor old chap! We must think it out. But once more, who is she?"

Somerville did not answer immediately. He was thinking if it were worth while to introduce Violet Desborough's name into the affair, at least as yet. However, he decided to tell Jefferson. It was a poor compliment to him as an old chum not to be perfectly frank.

"It is Miss Desborough," he said quietly, but with a shade deeper colour in his cheeks.

"Miss Desborough! The girl I met the other night. I am not altogether surprised."

"Why?"

"Because, my friend, I thought she showed an uncommon amount of interest in you and your doings. That is all."

Somerville looked embarrassed.

"But," continued Jefferson thoughtfully, "I don't think she's the sort of girl I should attempt to

approach until some of this tangle with the woman out in Nagasaki is unravelled. I may be mistaken, but I don't think it."

"But if there is no way out?" asked Somerville bitterly.

"Then," was the reply, "there are two things to do. Forget her and return or not to the other woman as you may decide, or make a clean breast of it to Miss Desborough and take your chance. There was something about her face and eyes," the speaker went on, "which I fancy indicates that she would probably understand the tangle you are in and sympathise with you. But I do not think she would listen to you until by some effectual and right means this Gordian knot is unloosed."

Somerville knew that his friend's estimate of Violet Desborough's character was a right one. Once before she had refused to listen to him because she thought he did not really love her; now he felt she would refuse because of the claims of the other woman.

"Does Mio-San believe you will go back?" Jefferson asked suddenly, after a longish silence, broken only by the noise of cinders falling on to the tiled hearth.

"I don't know," replied Somerville. "I think not. You see," he went on, "the native girls are used to temporary alliances with foreign settlers which last a few months—a year or two at most—and no one but myself," he said bitterly, "thought

the marriage before the Consul at all necessary. It seemed to me the straight thing to do, and I did it. I needn't go into my reasons. But for one thing, at that time I did not care in that way for Miss Desborough. I even had a vague idea that I might settle out there for years. There was so much to paint. Ah! old chap, you can have no idea how much. You, with your swell sitters—duchesses and nobodies who want to be immortalised in paint and canvas—know nothing of the fascinating, exquisite beauty of scene and atmosphere, flower and life out there. And then," as he paused a fraction of a minute ere going on, "I did not realise the gulf that lay between Mio-San and me in thought, mind, and speech. There was not even the *camaraderie* of Bohemia possible between us to make up for the loss of other things. Perhaps you'll think me a brute, but in three months I had become indifferent to her other than as some beautiful object that I liked to use in my pictures. And she knew it; and then the barrier grew fast and higher notwithstanding her poor, piteous efforts to pull it down. I have been hurt by it. But somehow I am not the temperament to make the best of a bad business, and I am back. Other men nearer home than Japan," he continued, as though seeking to excuse himself, "have made ghastly messes of marriage with women of their own race. I have made a mistake which cuts into the bone and marrow."

"There will come a way out," said Jefferson,

rising, but his voice was not as reassuring as his words. "I'm glad you've turned up here instead of mo'ing in some infernal hotel. I hate hotels to live in; one always seems to meet the wrong sort of people in them. But you had better have a look at your room. It's not as big as the studio in the Rue de Madame, but there is space enough for a bachelor, if you bring a few of your things in here and put them in the cupboard."

As Somerville was dressing for dinner he thought over what his friend Jefferson had said. It was much what he expected, but all the same he confessed to himself a feeling of disappointment. After his arrival in London he had thought of Rodney Jefferson as one who might, nay, even possibly would, have been able to suggest some solution which had failed to present itself to his own mind. And now he had found the difficulty of the circumstances had not seemed any less to his friend than to himself. One thing, he had been confirmed in his opinion of Violet Desborough's attitude towards such an affair, and he recognised that though he had been made so sure of her love for him when he saw her on the *Empress of China*, so long as Mio-San was alive, or at least so long as his marriage held good, Violet Desborough was placed out of his reach by the sentiment which was sure to possess her.

Then his thoughts travelled away across the sea to Mio-San, and he wondered how it was that he could regard her with such indifference without the

feeling being in the least tinged with active dislike. He even pitied her with sincerity, for he believed that she still loved him whatever change his own feeling towards her had undergone. Yumoto had told him over and over again that she would forget, that she would even after a little while marry some one of her own race. Time would prove—time that would hang heavily upon his hands ; but he thought Mio-San's love was unhappily of a more enduring sort than Yumoto argued.

Then the thought of the child came suddenly into his mind, and he wondered vaguely if he would hear of its birth, and whether it would be yet another link in the chain of circumstance which would perhaps for ever separate him from the woman he loved.

Then a vision of Violet Desborough presented itself to his mind as he had seen her leaning over the side of the mailboat waving him adieux as his *sampan* made for the shore, and he set his teeth at the thought that his marriage with Mio-San should have placed so impassable a barrier between them. He knew that had he asked her again to marry him as they stood upon the deck of the *Empress of China* in Nagasaki harbour her answer would have been "Yes." Now that he had travelled half across the world to be near her his lips were sealed. Even if he met her it would be but to chafe the more at the chains which bound him.

He realised to the full now that he was to pay the price—which so often had to be paid—for an act of

ill-considered Quixoticism, and there grew in him a silent rage against Fate.

Jefferson did his best during the evening to enliven his guest, but succeeded ill, for at the back of all the talk about Art and Jefferson's work lay for Somerville the gnawing pain of regret and disillusionment.

At length he said wearily, "I'm not much company, old chap, to-night, and I think, if you don't mind, I'll turn in. It will be a treat to have a shore bed again—the first real bed I've slept in for more than twelve months. Good-night."

"Good-night," replied Jefferson, shaking hands. "If there's anything more you want, ring the bell and Aston will come. He's a capital chap, and never minds what time he gets routed out. Sleep well. Perhaps the tangle won't turn out so bad after all. Have another cigar? There's no one to object to smoking all over the place here, though I generally try to get the scent of tobacco out of the studio a bit when any one is giving me a sitting."

When Somerville had gone Rodney Jefferson sat down, and, drawing his chair close to the fire, started thinking. To him it seemed a hard thing that this marriage of his friend to a native woman should stand in the way of his wooing the woman he loved and the woman who it was evident loved him.

"Poor old chap!" he ejaculated, "I know him of old. He did it for the best as it appeared to him for

the moment, and now he has got to pay. Some women," he mused, "might take him as he is, native wife and all ; but Miss Desborough, if I know anything of her type, is not built that way. And so—— Well, there is no way out that I can see."



CHAPTER XX

FLOWER OF THE SPRING—THE WOOING OF YOSHIDA
—KATAKURI SAN STRIKES A BLOW—YUMOTO
TELLS THE TRUTH



HE plum blossoms were shedding their fragrance in the garden of Okada, the father of Mio-San, at Ureshino, when her child was born—a tiny thing which had strange blue eyes of the West and a skin several tints lighter than the amber-hued one of the mother who bore her. As Mio-San saw the eyes of her babe a new hope awakened in her heart, which had been so heavy since the going of her lord, a desire that he might see the little Flower of the Spring which nestled so closely to her.

In the warm sunshine of the portion of the garden which immediately surrounded her father's house Mio-San and her baby sat day by day till the plum-

trees had shed the last lingering shower of their nacre-tinted petals on to the red earth beneath them, and those who loved flowers and the garden were now looking for the pink glories of the cherry.

Yet no message or word came from Yumoto in Nagasaki nor from Somerville across the sea.

After the first flush of joy at motherhood Mio-San had learned that even the tiny being who rolled in the sunshine upon the mat that Kusatsu San had, with grandmotherly care, spread for her, could not stand in the place of him who had gone. Once or twice there came a strange stirring in her heart, and she took little Flower of the Spring in her arms and trudged along the path towards the hill that gave her a clear view for some distance along the road leading back to Nagasaki—why she scarcely knew! But hope died hard now that it had been born again.

So passed the months until the cherry-trees in their turn had in the soft air of nights spread a pink carpet on the earth, and Okada had begun to think in the back of his mind that soon it would be time to see whether Yoshida of the tea-house by the singing river would not be prepared to wed Mio-San. In Okada's mind the marriage with the foreigner was as nothing, and he knew that Yoshida was wishful to add to the tea-house he owned, and Mio-San had yet many yen left of the sum she had brought with her from Nagasaki.

So it happened that Yoshida used to come in the intervals of business along the road to the garden,

and made it clear that he was willing to wed Mio-San because of the yen belonging to her. Okada had told his wife what he wished, and it never entered her mind that his desires could be gainsaid.

It was on a beautiful June evening that Mio-San first fully realised what was expected of her. Okada, who always treated her with more kindness than falls to the lot of most girls at the hands of their fathers, said to her when Yoshida had gone back to his tea-house, "Yoshida is an excellent and prosperous man, his tea-house is known far and near. Even *geisha* from Nagasaki will come to it for him, and he is making much money, my daughter. And he even deigns to wish to marry you."

Mio-San turned very pale. In her folly of hope and in her love for her baby there had been never a thought of Yoshida's meaning or of the possible reason of his many visits. How could there be when she was still her lord's?

But Mio-San had been taught the precepts of "Onna Daigaku," and she could not openly venture to disobey her father, so she said, "O my august father, let there be yet a little while before you ask me to listen to Yoshida who so honourably deigns to desire me as his wife. Perhaps my foreign husband may return, and he is rich, and he would be greatly angered were he to find me living as the wife of another. And then," continued Mio-San, knowing her father's love of money, though he was neither a hard nor grasping man, "my child should be poor instead of wealthy,

for my Somerville San had more money than a Chinaman could count in many hours, and the fingers and minds of Chinamen are quick and clever at counting money."

Okada paused when Mio-San had done speaking. There was something of common sense in what she said, and (for he did not know how long the *jokisen* took crossing the sea) there had been scarcely time for "the august foreigner" with whom his daughter had lived to yet return. At last he said, "Very good, my daughter; we will wait a moon or two and see whether O Somerville San will return to you. If he be as rich as you say and as Hoshin San told me, he would be welcome."

After this Yoshida came far less frequently to Okada's, and Mio-San dreamed her dream of hope.

Away in Nagasaki Yumoto sometimes wondered what had become of her, and whether she had fulfilled his prophecy that she would forget Somerville and perhaps marry again. Hoshin had given him the address of her father in Ureshino when he called to inquire for her shortly after she had been taken away by Okada, but Yumoto had neither the curiosity nor the inclination to write or make further inquiries—at least not unless it was in furtherance of Somerville's wishes.

About the end of June he had received another communication from the latter telling him that he had settled in London for a time with a friend after paying a flying visit to Paris, but saying nothing of Miss Desborough, at which Yumoto smiled. He

at once jumped to the conclusion that Somerville was about to marry her, but did not wish the fact known lest any rumour should reach Miss Desborough's ears concerning Mio-San.

"My friend, Somerville San," remarked Yumoto to himself, as he sat in his office thinking over the situation, "is wiser than he once was. Perhaps I was able to show him how foolish he had been to marry a *musumé* because she pleased him."

When he met McKenzie, as he still frequently did at Hanazono Restaurant at tiffin, he mentioned the fact of his suspicions to him.

"I think you are wrong," said McKenzie. "Somerville's a queer sort of chap, and I don't fancy his conscience or morals, or whatever you like to call it, would let him marry until he heard something about Mio-San which might free him."

But all the same, he told Katakuri San as they were at dinner that night what Yumoto had said.

Into Katakuri San's eyes there came a strange light as she listened, for she had neither forgotten nor forgiven Mio-San.

"O Yumoto San," she said, after a pause that was so lengthy that McKenzie glanced up at her face, "is surely right. Why should our honourable Englishman friend not marry the woman of his own race you told me he loved? Mio-San! What of her?" she continued contemptuously. "He will have forgotten her before the *jokisen* was half-way across the wide sea."

McKenzie did not reply. He was wondering

vaguely what he would do if ever he were wealthy enough to quit the Porcelain Works and return home.

Whilst she was speaking an idea was resolving itself in Katakuri San's mind. To-morrow she would see whether her enemy were entirely beyond her reach. She did not in the least care whether McKenzie thought Yumoto right or wrong. She was only glad that he had told her Yumoto's news.

Next morning, when McKenzie had left home for the Works, Katakuri San sat down to write. In her mean little heart was a glow of intense satisfaction as she took out her bronze *yatate*, which happened to have been a parting gift when Somerville left them, and after grinding up some ink took her finely-pointed brush in hand and commenced to trace the characters upon the paper. Writing was a somewhat laborious task, as a rule, to her, but to-day she was filled with gratitude that, neglected as her education had been, she had at all events learned to write.

When she had finished she folded the letter lengthwise and placed it in a rose-coloured envelope and addressed it, then placing it in the sleeve-pocket of her *kimono*, she selected a paper umbrella from several standing in the corner of the room and set off through the garden down into the town. She would not trust San-to with the posting of the precious letter, who, to tell the truth, she suspected of being in nowise amiably

disposed towards herself, though willing to serve her for the good wages McKenzie paid her. It was very hot, and as Katakuri San was not fond of walking, San-to, who watched her disappear down the garden path and out into the road, decided that her mistress was not bound upon any good work.

When she had posted her missive Katakuri San climbed the hill again, and spent the rest of the morning ere McKenzie returned for tiffin imagining the effect of the blow she had dealt poor little Mio-San, her only regret being that she was unable, owing to the distance Ureshino was from Nagasaki, to go over in a day or two to enjoy the sight of the wound she knew she would have inflicted.

In the afternoon of the next day as Mio-San was sitting on the verandah of the house playing with Flower of the Spring her father came up from the lower part of the garden with a letter in his hand.

"For you, my daughter, it has arrived," he exclaimed, handing it to her with curiosity written large upon his face. "Perhaps from your august foreign husband it is?" he added interrogatively.

But Mio-San, who had examined the post-mark, only shook her head sorrowfully. "No, my honourable father," she replied, "from some one in Nagasaki it is."

And then when he had gone away back to his work in the garden she opened the envelope.

Katakuri San's writing was none of the best, and at first Mio-San was unable to read it clearly. At

last, however, she read out slowly, whilst her child rolled on the matting in the sunshine at her feet, the words which her enemy had so exultingly penned. They were not many.

"NAGASAKI, June, 19—.

"O, Mio-San, most miserable of women," it began, "no more, as I told thee, ever wise one, on the *engawa* of thy house now deserted and empty of you and him, will O Somerville San, thy august husband, who, tiring of your despicable self, left you, rejoice your eyes. He departed across the wide sea to obtain his desire of the white woman who used to write him loving letters. And now he lives with her, and gives to her the caresses which you, foolish one, thought would be always yours. This I have heard from Yumoto San, to whom your foreign husband has written. Farewell, O deluded girl. He was in truth never yours or he would have returned."

As Mio-San read the cruel words a mist gathered before her eyes. All the hope, which since the birth of her child had gradually revived in her heart that Somerville would return, died suddenly. The letter fell on the floor of the verandah near the babe kicking and rolling in the sunshine, and then a puff of wind which came round the corner of the house from the river blew it away like the other letter of Katakuri San, and whirled it upward like a dead leaf in the air. But Mio-San did not cry out in her agony. It was a dumb pain that possessed her, and gradually,

as she sank down on the matting beside her child and buried her face, down which the tears were falling, in its tiny body, the idea formulated itself in her mind that she must go back to Nagasaki, must see Yumoto San herself, and find out from him whether the words Katakuri San had written were true or as false as she knew her heart to be.

If it were true, she would never see her lord's eyes fall upon their child, never see the glad surprise that she had so often pictured in her imagination steal over his face at the sight of Flower of the Spring's beauty, never know that if he had ceased to love her he loved the tiny mortal which was theirs.

Then a dull calm possessed her like the lull of heavy silence when a storm has worn itself out, and a little later when Yoshida came she listened to him without clearly shown dislike—for she was too stunned to care now that the fair flower of hope had withered in her heart once more—and he thought, poor fool, that she had commenced to realise the honour he proposed to do her by wedding her.

She only told her mother that she had had news which compelled her to go on the morrow to Nagasaki to see O Yumoto San.

"Perhaps your honourable foreign husband may have sent you more money?" queried Kusatsu San.

"Perhaps, O honourable parent, he may," was Mio-San's vague response.

Early next morning a *jinrikisha* came to the gate of Okada's garden with two sturdy *kurumaya* to draw it, and Mio-San departed for Nagasaki

Through the heat of a long day they toiled over the dust-clad road which stretched like a dun-coloured ribbon past rice-fields and scattered houses. And as the tired runners reached the crest of the hill above the town, ere descending through the woods by the steep zigzag road, the sun was sinking, rapidly bathing the exquisite harbour in a flood of softened golden light, and turning the summits of the higher hills on the eastern side of it a ruddy yellow. As her *jinrikisha* descended the hillside, and by narrow streets and byways reached the wider thoroughfares and at last came out upon the Bund, Mio-San was seized by a flood of tender and sad memories, which was succeeded by a terrible anxiety.

All day along the dusty road and past fields in which the rice was being planted only one thought seemed to possess her—"What should she hear from Yumoto San? What would she learn of her departed lord?" And now as the *kurumaya* at their journey's end quickened their pace, which had lagged somewhat during the last few miles, she was seized with a terrible apprehension, and would have for a moment or two turned back had such a thing been possible.

Yumoto was about to leave his office for the day when the *jinrikisha* drew up outside and Mio-San, assisted by one of the *kurumaya*, alighted.

As she entered the office her limbs, cramped by long sitting, felt as though they would give way beneath her, but she pushed open the door and went in.

Yumoto was giving some last instructions to his Chinese clerk, and for a moment he did not glance up. When he did so a look of utter astonishment overspread his face.

"O Mio-San!" he ejaculated.

"You are right, most august friend," replied Mio-San. "I have come far to see you and speak with you. I fear I find you honourably engaged with your business. Is it so?"

Yumoto, who had not taken his eyes off the tired, travel-stained, little figure, felt a great pity creep into his heart, whilst speculating why she had come. Whispering a few words to the clerk at his side, he said, "Mio-San, you have come to speak with me. Please come into my inconvenient office. I hope nothing is ill with your honourable health?"

Then, without waiting for any reply to his questions, he stepped to the door leading upstairs to his office overlooking the harbour, and Mio-San followed him.

When they were seated in the twilight of the room, the garish posters on the walls of which looked less insistent than any one could have supposed possible who had ever seen them in sunlight, he looked fixedly at his visitor for a moment or two, and then he said, "Now, most honourable lady, what is it your journey has made you come to say to me?"

Mio-San gazed at him as he sat in his office arm-chair slightly away from the fading light which came in through the window, and then she said slowly,

"Yesterday, just before sunset, a letter came to me from O Katakuri San which told me that my honourable lord, who had gone from me across the sea, had forgotten me, and that a woman of his own race loved him, and it is she to whom he speaks sweet words, and who now lives in the joy of his sight, and whose heart throbs at his caresses. It is from you, O Yumoto San, that O Katakuri San told me in her letter the news had come."

She paused a moment to stifle her anguish, and to attempt to control the heavy beating of her anxious heart, whose pulsations stirred the folds of her *kimono* across her breast.

Yumoto allowed his eyes to fall upon a letter which lay upon the table in front of him, and tried to think over the situation rapidly ere replying.

Seeing he was silent Mio-San, after a pause, went on, "O Yumoto San, friend of my august husband, tell me if this saying of Katakuri San's is true or false?" And then, as though unwilling after all to hear the truth she asked for, she cried out bitterly, "Do not say that my eyes shall never more see him, that he shall never hold in his strong arms the babe who has his eyes, blue as the sky at high summer. I have waited for his return, which you told me would be, for weary months; and even now Okada, my father, who does not believe in my august lord, is seeking to give me to Yoshida, the keeper of the *chaya* beside the singing waters. But I have said to him many times, 'What if my lord return?' What have you to say to me, O Yumoto

San? Does Katakuri San lie or not? Answer me in pity quickly."

All the while she had been speaking through Yumoto's alert mind had flitted many thoughts. At first he had had it in his heart to once more deceive her by saying that Somerville would return, after many moons perhaps, but still return. But the mention by her of Yoshida and her father's desire that she should marry again suggested a different course of action to his mind. Why should she not marry again? It would cut the Gordian knot which bound his too punctilious friend to her. She would grieve for a little while, a moon or two, and then she would forget, and Yoshida would take her as a bride. Women were all the same—they cried a little about the lover gone till the lover come dried their tears for them, and—then they forgot. At least so Yumoto thought as he sat opposite Mio-San and watched her anxious little face, down which tears fell that sparkled as the fading light from the window caught them. It was very easy for him, then, to make up his mind that he was doing a kind act to Somerville, and was not injuring Mio-San. Of course the former would never return, he reasoned, whether she remained faithful to his memory or not. Therefore it would be better for her to marry Yoshida.

At last he broke the silence, which seemed to Mio-San, waiting for his reply, to envelope and almost to crush her.

"Alas!" he began, "Katakuri San does not lie.

It is true that O Somerville San's business across the wide sea does not permit of his return as he thought. And——" He paused a moment, half-hesitant to strike the piteous little figure before him the final blow. But Yumoto dealt in tea and not sentiment, so he cleared his throat and went on, "And O Somerville San has found that he must marry a woman of his own race."

In the silence of the dingy office, which seemed so little in keeping with tragedy, there rang out a great wailing cry, and Mio-San rose, with her arms—from off which the sleeves of her *kimono* slipped back, leaving them bare and almost phantom-like in the gloom—stretched out in front of her as though she were blind.

"O, my beloved, august one," she cried, "that I am no more for ever to let my eyes feast upon thy face. . . ."

Yumoto caught her, thinking she was about to fall, but she almost pushed him aside. Then her weariness, which was now almost like that of death, overcame her, and she leaned upon him.

"To Hoshin's. Take me to O Haru San," she murmured. "There is no light. I cannot see. Take me to Hoshin's."

When Yumoto left her, after he had told Haru San something of what had happened, he wondered whether after all he had done right. But he remembered that Somerville's embarrassment would be greatly mitigated if he could but hear that Mio-San had re-married. And Yumoto was an imagina-

tive being, and therefore only saw clearly ahead that Mio-San and Yoshida would ere long become man and wife. Then, as he took out his case and lit a cheroot, he remembered that on the day he cabled Somerville's news of her wedding of the proprietor of the *chaya* five hundred excellent cigars would be as good as his. Somerville was a generous fellow, and would surely not forget his promise.

These thoughts enabled Yumoto to eat an excellent meal at Hanazono Restaurant untroubled by pricks of conscience; for, after all, he had reasoned, he had only anticipated Somerville's marriage to Miss Desborough. Perhaps he might have even got rid of his too punctilious ideas, and have married her already.

As he drank his *sake* and watched the *geisha* dancing, the memory of the recent scene with Mio-San in his office was pleasantly obliterated. Women, he thought, were wonderfully fascinating so long as one did not take them too seriously.



CHAPTER XXI

THE LOVE OF WOMAN—DESTINY OR WHAT ?



WEEK had passed since Mio-San's visit to Nagasaki, and Okada, her father, was thinking of the time when his desire that Mio-San should become the wife of Yoshida might be accomplished. Her mother had grieved with her in an uncomprehending way, and had done her best to again persuade her husband to postpone the marriage. But Yoshida, who was no longer young, was impatient, and even spoke of wedding the daughter of a potter if Mio-San remained longer obdurate.

One evening the latter overheard Yoshida and her father in conversation, and as they parted the latter said, "Most honourable Yoshida, your desire

to wed my despicable daughter shall come to pass at the new moon. She can no longer desire to disobey her father. Prepare thy magnificent house for my miserable child. She shall truly be yours at the new moon."

All night long these words seemed to throb in Mio-San's brain, sleeping or waking. She knew that her fate was decided. But she would make one more effort to escape such a fate. She clung in the darkness to the baby, slumbering peacefully on the little *futon* at her side, with a passionate grasp. In this frail form for the moment was re-incarnated the father who would never return. Then into her mind came the complete idea of her escape from the bondage of marriage with Yoshida, and thinking of it she fell asleep just as the dawn was breaking over the distant hills.

In the room which had been allotted to her in consequence of the money she had brought and the august position she had held as the wife of Somerville was the tiny shrine which had stood in her bedchamber in her home on the Nagasaki hillside. Into this shrine at noon on the day following she placed two *ihai* (memorial tablets), with their *kaimyo* in letters of red and gold. This was the outward sign that she had determined to remain faithful to the memory of him who, so far as she was concerned, might well have been dead and laid to rest in the cemetery near the temple, beneath the spreading pines and cryptomerias, amid the grey, lichen-stained memorials of forgotten dead. Then,

as the afternoon sun streamed in through the opened *shoji*, and whilst her baby slumbered peacefully upon the *futon* in the corner of the room, she knelt before the shrine and prayed.

In the garden outside, the flowers of which bloomed, refreshed by the rain of the night before—for it was the "dew month" of the season of rice planting—the cicadae kept up their insistent noise, and from a distance came the water-music of the river swollen by rain. But Mio-San, kneeling before the *batsuma*, in which stood the *ihai* of the lost one and she herself, heard neither. In her heart was the overwhelming sense of desolation, desertion, and despair.

At last the prayers, which she murmured so softly over and over again that her whispering voice sounded like that of the gentle autumn breeze amid the higher branches of the pines, ceased. Beside her on the matting lay a shining object whose blades every now and again caught the sunbeams which fell upon them when the lingering wistaria blossom hanging in long pendants from the eaves of the verandah were swung aside by the wind. At last one more cry was sent up from Mio-San's grief-stricken heart to the impassive figure of the Buddha within the shrine.

Then she slowly, and with hands that trembled with piteous half-reluctance, removed the pins, many of which had been Somerville's gifts, from her beautifully arranged hair, which soon fell in dark, blue-black masses about her shoulders almost

to her waist. It was this that she would have laid with scarcely a regret, although it was her glory, upon Somerville's knees in the coffin had he died; but to make this rich offering of her undying love for him in that way had been denied her. Now there was no such sacrifice possible save to the memory of him.

Mio-San paused for a moment when about to take up the scissors off the floor beside her, and, taking a long coil of the glossy tresses in her hands, she drew it across her shoulders and covered it with kisses. That one silent act was the only sign of regret she permitted herself. Then, taking the keen-edged scissors in her hand, she cut each tress from her head until the last was severed, and the whole of her beautiful hair lay on the white matting in a heap. As the last coil fell under the shears a deep, heartrending sob broke from her, and her eyes filled with tears.

The baby on the *futon*, awakened by the noise, regarded her with blue, wonder-filled eyes, but Mio-San heeded it not. She gathered the hair up and plaited it roughly until it formed one thick, short rope, and then she rose to her feet and laid the whole glossy offering, emblem of her youth and beauty, within the *butsudan* round the base of Somerville's *ihai*.

Once more she knelt again in prayer, and it was thus—shorn of her beautiful hair, which she would never permit to grow again—that her mother found her.

With an exclamation of horror and astonishment Kusatsu San ran to her daughter's side.

"What hast thou done, O most miserable girl?" she cried. "What is it I see? You with no longer hair upon your head. Speak; what is the meaning of it?"

Mio-San turned round, and, facing the speaker, replied, "O my honourable all-wise mother, cannot you understand? I am a widow, but it has not been permitted me by the gods to lay my hair upon the knees of my august husband as I might have done had he died and been buried amid the graves of our ancestors, so I have laid my offering of undying love before the *ihai* which I have placed with that of myself within the *butsudan*. It is useless for Yoshida to hope now that I will marry him."

"O my daughter," said Kusatsu San brokenly, "what is it that your august father will say? How will you face his anger at what he will look upon as a foolish act? For O Somerville San is not dead—otherwise your sacrifice might be honourable and meet. Yoshida is a wealthy man," continued the speaker, for often had Okada impressed this fact upon her when she pleaded that Mio-San should be not yet forced into a marriage she dreaded, "and you would have much honour as his wife. And has he not said that you may take the child with you in his august and wonderful condescension? Why should you refuse to wed so gracious and wealthy a husband, whose house is prosperous, and whose land is much in extent? Now," Kusatsu San

rambled on in her fear of Okada's wrath, "maybe Yoshida the rich and generous will not look upon you with favour until the hair which you have so unthinkingly cut from your head again grows long as before. Miserable girl, what have you to say?"

Mio-San did not reply for a few moments to her mother's upbraiding words. She knew that though her mother loved her there was no comprehension possible to her narrow mind of love for the memory of Somerville San such as she felt. Kusatsu San's creed had ever been obedience to her husband and to her eldest son. She had learned most of the teaching contained in the pages of "*Onna Daigaku*," and had known no other education. She could scarcely write, and only read with difficulty. She was of the last generation, whilst Mio-San was of the more enlightened present.

"O august mother, who deigns thus to speak with me, your unworthy and miserable daughter," Mio-San said at length, "the hair which I have cut off is meant for a sign of my perpetual widowhood. The few poor hairs which remain will not meet with favour in the eyes of O Yoshida San. Surely he will now turn his august glance towards the face Yusuri San, who is beautiful and young."

To Mio-San's mind her mother's suggestion that Yoshida would, now that her beautiful hair had been cut off, no longer desire her for his wife had brought the only gleam of comfort which had come to her for many days. If only she might be per-

mitted to dwell with her august parent, tending her baby until the gods should see fit to summon her to the Land of Shadows !

Though Okada loved her with a somewhat unusual affection seeing that she was but a daughter, he could scarcely control his anger when he learned and saw what she had done. That night he went to Yoshida, and whilst they sat on the verandah of his house told him what Mio-San had done, and asked him if he still had any desire for her as his wife.

Yoshida saw that Okada was hoping that he would still be prepared to marry her, and so he said, "She is less to be desired now than before" (but even shorn of her beautiful hair he knew that she was prettier of form and face than Yusuri San, both of whose eyes did not look at one at the same time), "but you say, Okada San, that she has many yen which the Englishman who had her to wife in Nagasaki left her as consolation?" Okada nodded his head, and Yoshida continued, "And it may be that you would for the sake of thy daughter's marriage with me be willing to give some yen?"

Okada looked thoughtful, but he knew Yoshida of old, and the possibility of his making such a suggestion had been foreseen. However, he did not speak for a moment or two, but sat looking out across the river to where he could see the house of Yusuri San's father and the *musumé* herself walking on the little balcony erected partly over the river's brink. Yoshida's eyes also travelled in

that direction, and Okada, noticing the fact, made his decision.

"My unworthy daughter, O Yoshida San," he remarked, "has of her own many yen, but if your eyes still look upon her with favour a few more yen (though I am not a rich man) shall be added to them. What is it you say?"

Yoshida's heart was made glad, for he desired Mio-San and the yen that she possessed. And as for her hair, he thought she could for a time wear false locks like some of the *geisha* he had seen on his visits to Nagasaki. So he replied, "I will wed your honourable daughter, O Okada San, but see that she goes not out so that our neighbours and the other women come to know that she has cut off her hair and declared that she will marry no man. But I am old if she is young, and I can wait not much longer for her. Is she to be mine at the new moon?"

And after a pause Okada replied, "She shall be yours."

Then Yoshida clapped his hands together loudly and a pretty *musumé* brought the two men some of the best whisky *sake*, and they drank together on the bargain. When they had finished Okada took leave of Yoshida, and crossing the bridge over the river, walked back along the road to his garden with a feeling of satisfaction pervading his whole being. For the whisky *sake* had been very good, and Yoshida had been less exigent than he had feared concerning his marriage with Mio-San.

Next morning the latter was told her fate. Okada made it very clear to her, notwithstanding her protestations that she could not marry Yoshida, that when the silver sickle of a new moon appeared in the sky, she was to become the wife of Yoshida the tea-house keeper.

The teaching of obedience, which for many centuries had been almost the only instruction given to the women of her class and race, sapped from her the resistance she had, during many days and nights since she returned to the house of her father, determined to make against re-marriage, and it was with a leaden heart she betook herself to her own chamber to think.

In her heart there was now nothing save a dull, dumb feeling of despair, and into her mind for a while nothing came—no clear thoughts—only the one dominating idea which possessed it to the exclusion of everything else. At the rising of the new moon out of the sea Yoshida, the old Yoshida, whose look when he gazed at her caused her a sickening sense of repulsion, would possess her—would be to her what her augustly beautiful lord had been. Though the sun shone brightly out in the garden and scarcely a breath of fresh air stirred the leaves or the fading blossoms of the wistaria hanging below the eaves, she shivered with a dreadful sense of icy chill, which even seemed to strike into her throbbing heart itself. There was no way out save one.

At length, as she grew calmer and could think,

an idea commenced to formulate itself, which long ago had once or twice presented itself to her mind when she and Somerville had commenced to drift apart after some unintentional, but none the less bitter, instance of his neglect. Now, as she thought of him, the same idea returned, and she was seized with a terrible joy. Surely in the Land of Shadows, where the beloved ghosts dwelt, there would be peace for her, and if at times she too returned as they, could she not go to him and, unseen perhaps, look upon his face once more? These beloved ghosts could cross rivers and mountains, she had heard many times, and could not the sea which divided him and her be overpassed?

Till long after noon she remained in her room lost in thought, possessed with this one idea which had presented itself to her sorrowing, despairing mind.

Kusatsu San came and gazed upon her, and even spoke to her. But she made no reply beyond an almost inarticulate plea to be left undisturbed.

Towards the afternoon her mother brought Flower of Spring and laid her upon the *futon* in the corner of the room, but by some strange process of the working of Mio-San's mind she scarcely noticed her child, who soon fell asleep, tired out with the air and sunshine of the garden.

At last she rose and went across to it, and knelt down over it till her throbbing brow touched its small, cool face.

At the contact Flower of the Spring opened her

blue eyes drowsily for a brief moment, and then closed them again. And Mio-San felt that the eyes of Somerville had looked at her once more.

Like one in a dream she rose, and set off, as she had done many times before since she had come back to Ureshino both with her babe and without her, along the road towards the river for the bath which so many other women would be taking at that hour.

When she crossed the bridge spanning the rushing river the voice of the water seemed to be calling the name of him she loved.

As she entered the long wooden shed which enclosed the hot springs she heard a woman say, "Look! that is Mio-San whom her foreign husband left. She is to marry O Yoshida San at the new moon."

At the name of Yoshida Mio-San, who saw no one clearly, and in whose ears was still the sound of the name whispered by the water as it rushed over the rocks beneath the bridge, shivered and passed along into the bath with a face so colourless that even the men noticed it.



An hour later a woman hurried along the sunlit road to Okada's garden as swiftly as her *geta* would permit. Her face was white and terrified, and it was evident she had come from the baths in haste, for her attire was in disarray as though she had scarcely stopped to dress.

Okada was tending his flowers at the far end of the garden he loved so well. The iris-beds were now in full bloom, and as the woman approached he was contemplating their mauve and yellow loveliness.

As she came along the sunlit path, on the flat stones of which her *geta* rang sharply, he looked up, and called out in astonishment at her frightened face, "What is wrong?" without the usual polite preliminaries, "O Ume San, what is wrong?"

Ume San paused a moment as she reached his side, and then she said slowly and tearfully, for she was one of Mio-San's old schoolfellows, "Alas! O Okada San, weep, for thy daughter Mio-San is dead. She came to the baths to cleanse herself but an hour or so ago, and now she lies dead. The waters swallowed her up, and Yoshida is robbed by them of his intended wife."

Okada stood in the middle of the path near the iris pond, in which the frogs were croaking monotonously, as one stunned. For a moment or two the idea of what Ume San had told him failed to penetrate his dazed mind. But at last he spoke.

"You do not speak the truth, Ume San," he said. "Mio-San cannot be dead. She was here well and beautiful but a short hour or so gone. You are mistaken."

But Ume San shook her head. "I am not mistaken," she replied. "Truly her august spirit has departed on its journey to the Land of Shadows. She is dead."

Okada would still fain not have believed her ; but whilst they stood there in the garden a little procession arrived at the gate, and with the weeping of women, and amid the respectful curiosity of a tiny crowd that had gathered outside, Mio-San, still, but with a face of peaceful calm and happiness, was borne through an environment of exquisite flowers and the scent of many blossoms within the house of Okada, her father.



CHAPTER XXII

A MESSAGE FROM THE EAST—THE KNOT IS CUT—
THE SPRING OF IMMORTAL HOPE



It was more than a week ere Yumoto heard of the final scene of the little tragedy which had commenced within his own ken in the house upon the Nagasaki hillside.

The tea-planter of Ureshino, to whom he had written early in the year when getting into communication with Mio-San's people, happened to have business in Nagasaki, and called on him. And then, in conversation, the whole sad story was told to Yumoto. No one seemed to know in Ureshino—so at least said Kan-zan, the tea-planter—how the affair had happened; and for several days after the occurrence the village was divided into two parties—those who said that Mio-San's death was

an accident and those who said she had compassed her own death.

When Kan-zan had gone Yumoto leaned back in his chair and thought deeply. One fact remained clear, Mio-San was dead and would no longer prove a source of embarrassment to his honourable friend Somerville. The excellent cigars, the smoking of which he had often anticipated with pleasure, seemed very near now.

Whilst Kan-zan had been telling him the story he had felt a passing sense of keen regret, but the effect of this had soon worn off. Reduced to its elements—and Yumoto was fond of this process of logic—the situation amounted to little more than the death by her own hand, or otherwise, of a gardener's daughter at Ureshino, which only gained any importance in his mind by reason of the fact that by it an esteemed friend's embarrassment was largely alleviated. Then he suddenly remembered that he had forgotten to ask Kan-zan anything concerning the child. "But after all," he said musingly, whilst his eyes looked away out of the window absently at the throng on the sunlit *hatoba*, "it is just as well I was not curious enough to do so. I need not trouble my august friend Somerville with the matter."

Then Yumoto rose and went out along the Bund to the telegraph office, and cabled to Somerville in London.

Rodney Jefferson and Somerville were just finishing their breakfast on a brilliantly fine June morning,

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and congratulating themselves that the day on the river they had planned for a week past would prove a pleasant break after several weeks of hard work, when Aston entered and handed Somerville Yumoto's cablegram.

Jefferson glanced up as his friend turned the envelope over, as though seeking to discover the sender and contents without opening it. At last, when Aston had left the room, he tore it open.

The message was very brief, for Yumoto was a business man, and had learned to economise words when they cost him nearly two dollars each.

"Not bad news, I hope?" Jefferson queried slowly, as he saw Somerville's face blanch.

"Yes," replied the latter huskily, pushing the flimsy slip of paper across the table. "Read."

Jefferson took it and read the message—"She died with her people at Ureshino ten days ago.—YUMOTO." That was all.

The sender had hesitated at first whilst he was writing out the message in the busy office whether the last few words were necessary, but had decided to cable them out of consideration for Somerville's feelings, thinking that it would be a satisfaction to him to know that the woman he had abandoned had not died away from the solace of her own people.

Through Somerville's mind rushed a flood of vain and vague regrets. And then, although he would have had it otherwise, came the overmastering thought and the joy of it that he was free—free to see the woman he desired with such overpower-

ing longing. Not yet awhile perhaps, but soon. Sooner than he had dared to hope the cords which bound him had been severed, and he was free.

No thought of the manner of Mio-San's death just then entered his mind. Even his regrets were those one may have for the loss of something intimately connected with one, but which one does not prize.

Jefferson on the other side of the table was thinking what a fortunate fellow Somerville was. He had never known the sweetness and innocence of the dead, or he might have judged his friend more harshly.

At last he said, "Nature has provided you a solution which perhaps the wit of man would have failed to do to the satisfaction of your somewhat Quixotic sense of honour, old man." Somerville winced at the last phrase. "Poor little soul, Heaven rest her!"

There was silence in the room for a moment or two, and then Jefferson, as the other said nothing, went on—

"What are you going to do?" he asked, glancing at Somerville, who was crumbling a piece of bread absently between his fingers.

"I shall cable to Yuruto to write me fully," he replied slowly, "and then I think I shall return to Paris for a month or two, but I am not sure."

"And what about the woman?" said Jefferson wonderingly, for he knew so little of the circumstances of Mio-San's and his friend's tragic

estrangeme it that any very protracted regret for her death did not enter into his calculations.

Somerville's pale face flushed. After a slight pause he said hesitatingly, "I must have time to think. At least till Yumoto's letter arrives I can decide nothing."

But all the time there was a note of joy in his heart which no memory of the past days in the Orient could silence.

When he had retired to his own studio, a room which he had rented on the floor above Jefferson's flat, whose other rooms he had arranged to share, he sat down to think.

His sense of common propriety revolted from the idea of approaching Violet Desborough with a view of again asking her to marry him until a decent interval should separate such a proceeding from Mio-San's death. But at the same time he recognised that his departure without a word for Paris, where he would remain until the autumn at work, and endeavouring to find a tenant for his old studio, would possibly vex her and even be misunderstood.

He had met her several times since his return, and he knew that she loved him as she had done even when refusing him upon the *Orient Queen*. The voice of his desire urged that he should delay no longer—should assure his own happiness now that it once more seemed within reach. But as this voice spoke the vision of the little woman who in her own way had loved him so well, and between whom and him racial differences had placed a gulf

that he was incapable of bridging, seemed to plead sorrowfully for some slight delay prompted by regret.

Next day Violet Desborough received a brief note from Somerville which told her of his almost immediate departure for Paris and his deep regret that he would not see her again ere he left. But between the lines she could read the happiness he said he would experience on his return.

"I shall call on you if you are in town," he said in ending, "within a few hours of my return. There is something I wish to ask of you which more than a year ago you refused to grant me."

As Violet Desborough folded the letter and put it away with the few others she had received from him there was a look of contentment upon her face that was full of promise for the man who had written it.

Somerville had been in Paris nearly two months ere Yumoto's letter reached him. In the penning of it his friend had been as discreet as his wont. "Why trouble my friend?" he had said to himself, as he sat down to write it, with the autumn rain rattling like buckshot on the roof above his head and blotting out most of the length of the *hatoba* with a watery veil; "why trouble him with painful details or a mention of the child who bore in her eyes and face the image of her white father?" And so beyond the fact that Mio-San had been drowned whilst bathing in the public baths at Ureshino Somerville learned nothing.

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During his two months' stay in Paris the regret and the small measure of self-condemnation from which he had suffered for the first few days after the receipt of Yumoto's cablegram had gradually faded, and he was too honest to seek to delude himself by simulated sorrow.

He had succeeded in disposing of the remainder of his term of the studio in the Rue de Madame, and there was nothing to keep him much longer away from London and the woman he loved.

The day after he received Yumoto's letter he wrote to Rodney Jefferson to advise him of his return within a fortnight.

The September winds were stripping the trees of the Boulevards of their leaves and whirling them around the street corners to the embarrassment of pedestrians when Somerville left Paris for London. Although it was the autumn of Dame Nature, in his heart was the Spring of immortal hope.

Rodney Jefferson welcomed him gaily, for in the eyes of his returning friend the light of unaffected happiness gleamed.

There was no reference to the past, for Somerville had buried that under the thin earth of the present as only such a temperament as his could.

"You will see her?" queried Jefferson as they sat down to dinner.

"Yes," was the reply, "to-night."

THE END.

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